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MASTER OF DRAGONS

A novelette

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MAY 8

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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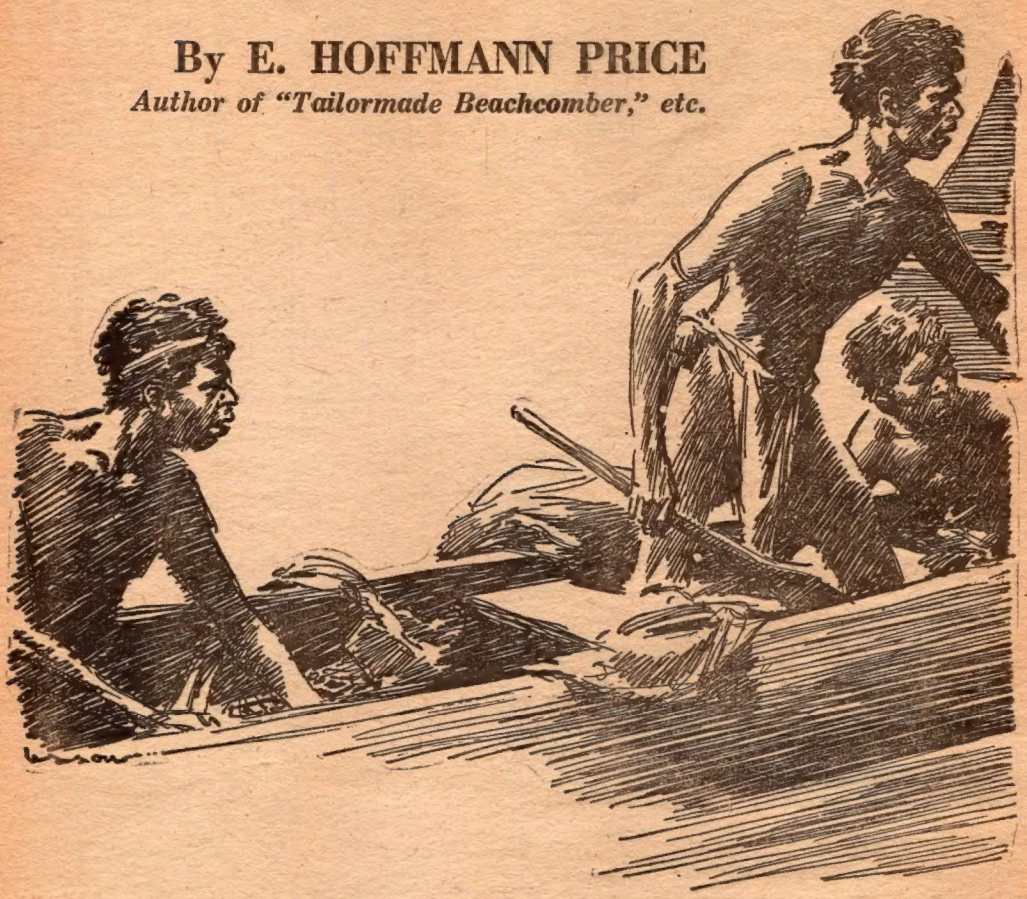
MASTER OF DRAGONS

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

Author of "Tailormade Beachcomber," etc.



I

GIL JORDAN watched Jumbuck Charley and the other two blackboys pull a three-hundred-pound groper into the dugout; they were handy with the spear, particularly when they were back in the jungle behind Port Darwin. Tough customers, and except for Jumbuck, none too reliable, he told himself, as he eyed their seven foot frames, all agleam with oil. On the other hand, you could trust a blackboy a lot further than you could the little yellow men in the pearling lugger which wallowed lazily out there in the Timor Sea.

Jordan did not underestimate the Japs he was hunting, and he hoped that Naval Intelligence would not underestimate his slowly gathered reports on their activities in Australian water.

He stretched his long frame, lazily and languidly. Jordan looked frail and stringy, compared to the powerful aborigines; and when he took the bamboo shaft of the three-pronged spear, and went to the prow of the dugout, he looked clumsy to boot. But that was part of his act. Boarding that pearling lugger was not to be accomplished by direct approach.

Jordan was barefooted. He wore grimy denim pants, and a torn shirt through which his hide showed in tanned patches. The blackboys clucked and chattered as they worked the hand-hewn craft closer

Anyone Who Has Been in the Intelligence Service for Any Length of Time Knows That Traitors Are Where You Find Them. And Nazi and Jap Are Two of a Kind Except for the Difference in Stature and Color

to the Japanese lugger. It was going to be fun watching a "sundowner" try to spear fish.

They lifted their paddles, letting her lose way. Jumbuck Charley crouched beside Jordan, scanning the clear water. Jordan wanted to hold his breath; the reek of rancid grease was stifling, but, after all, the blackboy was fragrant, compared to the pearling lugger.

"And a pearling boat is a rose compared to those yellow bums," Jordan told himself.

He was thinking of an item in the Melbourne *Herald*, which said, in part, *"The Japanese airline from Palao to Dilhi constitutes Australia's introduction to peaceful penetration—"* This struck him as deliberate understatement, for the Australians had planted mines in every entrance of the 1250 mile stretch of the Great Barrier Reef which guards the Queensland coast.

Without doubt, the Japanese pearling boats had every mine spotted.

Jumbuck Charley pointed, nudged Jordan, whispered in pidgin English. A blunt

headed groper nearly seven feet long lay motionless in the clear water. Jordan, rising to poise the spear, could feel the biting disapproval of the men behind him; he was deliberately ignoring their instructions and their example.

Then the thrust. No one was surprised when he over-reached himself. The shock transmitted by the bamboo shaft told him that he had harpooned his prey; and then he went over the side, adding his splash to the foam and fury which whipped the water.

When he came up, sputtering and gasping, Jordan seemed confused and stunned; the blackboys yelled, clucked, gestured, but he struck out for the lugger instead of toward the dugout. They plied their paddles, and instead of pulling a groper over the side, they gave Jordan a hand.

By now the dugout was within hailing distance of the lugger which Jordan had studied through powerful binoculars, the previous day. The Japanese crew was amused; so was the rangy white man who lounged under a tattered awning which screened part of a deck all littered with lines, coils of air hose, and diving gear.

He gestured toward a helmet, and said, "I say, chum, you don't spear 'em, you go in right after 'em."

Jordan chuckled good naturedly at the jibe. Ignoring the silent Japs, he countered, "You try this bloody spear and see what you can do!"

"For all the shell I'm getting, why not?" the other retorted.

"This your boat?"

"In Australian waters, it is. I'm a dummy. Hewitt's the name—come aboard for a spot of whiskey."

"Don't mind if I do."

HEWITT had an Australian accent; he was lanky, muscular, burned to a deep tan. The sun had bleached his sandy hair, and like Jordan, he had sun lines bitten deeply about his blue eyes.

Jordan, once over the side, went on, "Dummy, eh? Easier than what I've been doing."

Hewitt was the front for the Japs who actually owned the lugger; since the pearling license was in his name, the boat could operate in waters from which Asiatics were banned. Being a dummy was the last resort of a bum; poor food, worse pay, and that held out, lest the figurehead owner go ashore and disappear. But there was whiskey, and plenty of it. Jordan, pouring a slug into the little saki cup Hewitt handed him, decided that it was good liquor; and regarding Hewitt as he raised his drink, he wondered why the dummy was trim and fit, instead of bleary-eyed and sodden.

Jordan jerked a thumb shoreward, at the landing fields, the new town with its gleaming white hotel, its bank, its broad streets, and the cantonments which reached far into the jungle. "It's getting harder every day to keep out of uniform. Say, how do you stand the smell?"

Hewitt grimaced. "Get used to anything. After all, it's better than humping the bluey."

Jordan shrugged. "Waltzing Matilda ain't so bad, but 'travelers' are getting damn unpopular all over the country."

He looked back at the jungle, beyond whose three hundred mile fringe a newly built highway reached into the heart of the continent he had crossed with all his belongings rolled up in a blue blanket and humped on his back; tramps were not getting the ready welcome they once had at every sheep station. There was far too much of the work or fight spirit, and conscription made things worse. Hewitt seemed to understand and sympathize with a sundowner's reluctance to have anything to do with war or labor.

"Waltzing Matilda," he said, wistfully, "ain't what it used to be. But see here, chum, I don't know anyone who needs a dummy."

Jordan poured another slug, right to the brim, and gulped it.

Hewitt went on, "How's the highway

from Alice Springs? Think they'll finish it before the rains?"

JORDAN knew that the army engineers would complete the job before the area behind Darwin became a knee-deep muck, but he said, "Not this year, I'd say. Good idea came too late."

He rose, stretched, and went toward the rail. Hewitt's farewell contained a cheery thought: "If the blackboys start to spear 'travelers,' the uniform'll begin to look good!"

Jordan shrugged, and went over the side. Then, as the boys shoved off, he wondered if he had fooled Hewitt. Hewitt hadn't fooled him. The man just didn't quite ring true. He was more than a dummy.

That evening, Jordan left his brush shelter on the beach. He wore clean whites, and while not conspicuously well dressed, neither was he out of place in the lobby of the Darwin Hotel.

Officers in khaki shorts, army wives in formal gowns, leathery-faced Mounted Police in shirt sleeves and breeches; nothing was too free and easy, nor anything too staid and correct for the war boom town from which half a dozen airlines reached out to Singapore, to Rabaul, to Port Moresby, to Batavia and to London.

Rangy, devil-may-care enlisted men from the interior, prospectors, sheep and cattlemen, sugar planters and banana growers; the lovely Chinese receptionist had a word and a smile for all. Then Jordan saw her turn to a blonde newcomer—an exquisite creature, long limbed, shapely, with great violet eyes and a sweet mouth.

"No, Miss Walraevens, there has been no call."

Walraevens—odd name; Jordan wondered if she was Flemish, or streamlined Dutch, a refugee from Belgium or the Netherlands. She penned a few words on a card and said, "Then please hand this to Mr. Hewitt."

Jordan felt that queer, electric tingling which thrills a hunter when long stalked game is finally lined up under his sights. The shock of hearing her ask for Hewitt made him realize how strongly she had appealed to him at first glance. His evening had acquired direction.

Instead of lounging and listening, getting an hour's relief from his role of waterfront bum, he wanted to see more of Hewitt, a dummy who had a date with a girl who stayed at the Darwin Hotel.

Half an hour later, the dummy came in. He wore whites and a monocle, and there was no trace of pearling lugger stench about him. Hewitt looked as if he owned the place. After a moment of scrutiny, he stretched long legs toward an alcove. Jordan trailed after him, saw him meet the blonde, heard him say, "Terribly sorry, Marcelle, but I simply couldn't get away sooner."

They went into the dining room. Jordan did not for a moment consider the chances of following Marcelle Walraevens and the mysterious Mr. Hewitt, for even a momentary clash of glances would be dangerous, so he stepped to the broad street, and joined the throng of soldiers.

IN A CROSS alley, he found Jumbuck Charley. The big abo, apparently asleep, and entirely unaware of the Chinese traders, the camel drivers, the hilarious soldiers who milled about, snapped to his feet before Jordan could hail him.

"That dummy. Follow him when he leaves the hotel," Jordan said to the blackboy. "Never mind the white *lubra*. I'll tend to her."

Charley grinned. If Hewitt left Darwin, the big abo could take up the trail, a week later, track the man for months; as long as the dummy did not put out to sea, or take to the air, Charley would nail him.

Jordan headed for the house of Brady, the newly arrived American consul. There, once he had a cigar going, he said, "Bill, I want all the dirt on a streamlined blonde named Marcelle Walraevens. But first,

listen to a couple hunches, and get them to Headquarters in code."

"Getting hot, Gil?"

"My job is reporting trifles, not interpreting them. The *Tatsu* is a pearling lugger that could sail from here to Acheen. I met her dummy today, and he's off color. He wants to know too much about the military road to Alice Springs, and he's too open handed, dishing out grand Scotch to sundowners."

Brady's heavy face twisted in a ferocious frown. He spat out a shred of cigar wrapper. "What's that got to do with the Nippie airlines from Palao to Dilhi?"

"If you ask me, Hewitt is a liaison man, delivering messages from Jap or Nazi observers in Darwin, taking them to Dilhi, for instance. My bet is that that commercial line to Portuguese territory has more than a civilian landing field. That's where I'm going, and you keep an eye on Hewitt."

They wrangled over that for an hour or more. Then Jumbuck Charley came in. The abo said, "Him fellow make walkabout, you come see what fashion pidgin."

The consul groaned. "What in hell did he say?"

Jordan translated, "Our dummy is on the prowl. Apparently his nomadic instincts are taking over, and Charley smells a rat."

"Good Lord, the rat'd smell Charley first!"

"Charley," Jordan insisted, "is a tracker, not a violet. And he thinks I ought to see what fashion pidgin—what kind of business Hewitt is up to. Charley, where's the *lubra,* the yellow-haired Mary?"

Charley said that she was finishing her dinner alone.

Brady straightened up. "By God! If that girl is the knockout you say she is, there must be something wrong, or Hewitt wouldn't run out on her."

"I like this more and more," Jordan said, and turned to follow the seven-foot tower of smells. "Be seeing you."

"Hey, wait—" The consul dug a .38 Colt out of the lower compartment of the smoking stand. "You may be running into something."

"Keep it, and thanks. Too noisy."

II

JORDAN followed the blackboy to the waterfront and the old town, where shacks, brush and bark huts, tin-roofed houses made an unsavory tangle; instead of streets, there were only irregular spaces. Here men of the sea met men of the jungle, and would meet, until modern Darwin cried for more space.

Jumbuck Charley halted, pointed to an isolated shack whose drawn shades were outlined by threads of yellow light. Jordan picked his way through rocks and rubbish, managing not to stumble over bottles and rusty cans. This conspiracy might only be a bit of illicit pearl trading, or plans for poaching; but whatever it was, looking and listening could pay dividends.

Jordan's stealth, however, was wasted. Just as he began to distinguish the mutter of voices, a white man yelled, and furniture crashed. There was no mistaking the groan which followed, nor the lull whose comparative silence was broken only by an agonized wheezing of breath. The light dimmed to a murky yellow as Gil Jordan bounded forward.

He stumbled, clawed earth and rubbish, and came up clutching the neck of a bottle, a handy weapon in a pinch. Hewitt needed a lift, and Jordan was all for helping, just on the chance that the dummy would talk later. Jumbuck Charley, catching up, gave him a boost. Together they charged the door. The light was brighter now, and the place reeked with kerosene fumes.

Jordan and the blackboy landed together. The rickety panel scarcely broke their stride; the impact flung them against each other, shoulder to shoulder, and the rebound pitched them into a room whose litter indicated that it had for a long time been vacant.

An old-fashioned lamp, knocked from the wall bracket, had smashed against the floor, spreading kerosene; and now the wick had set fire to the fuel.

Hewitt was trying to crawl away from the blaze. Blood drenched his coat; blood made a trail on the dirty floor. The man's breath came in sobbing gasps. The knives of treachery had left little life in him. If the dummy was to talk, it had to be very quickly.

Jordan yelled to Charley, "Hey, come back! Give me a hand here, never mind them!"

The blackboy turned from the back steps, reluctantly giving up the pursuit of the assailants who scrambled over rubbish, and into the gloom between adjacent houses.

Hewitt collapsed. Jordan turned him over, and with Charley's help, slid the wounded man toward the front steps. Already, the sunbaked shack was crackling, and in a few minutes, it would be all ablaze.

"Grab that tuckerbag!" Jordan pointed to the briefcase which lay near the overturned table, then bent over the wounded man.

Hewitt's throat was deeply slashed; there was a stab in his chest, another in his back, and his arms were cut, showing how he had spent a vain moment, trying to defend himself. Arterial blood, coming in irregular spurts, told Jordan that there would be little chance of questioning the dummy, then or ever, yet he did his best to pinch the mangled artery, while directing the blackboy to put a tourniquet at the upper arm.

Spreading flame drove them from their work. Jumbuck Charley lifted Hewitt bodily, while Jordan followed, thumb and finger digging into the throat wound. Embers rained about them; the fire spread to the neighboring shack. As soon as they were clear, Jordan sent the blackboy for help. Moving Hewitt might be fatal.

Some minutes later, an ambulance came from the cantonment. An interne, looking at the wounded man, shook his head. "Damn small chance."

"Give him a transfusion, Doctor! Pull him through," Jordan demanded. "It's important."

The interne was nettled by the commanding tone, which simply did not fit in this waterfront shacktown. "Really, now?"

Jordan hefted the blood-splashed briefcase. "I've not had time to look into this. And if I had, I couldn't tell you about it. But this man has to talk, do you understand?"

Then Jordan was busy with the police. "Take me to the American Consulate for two minutes. One minute, if you're in a hurry."

THEY were reasonable, though it was plain that they had their doubts. Jordan wasted a moment looking for Jumbuck Charley; the blackboy had faded. His nickname had come from his hobby of sheep stealing, and cops made him nervous; nothing else did.

At the consulate, Jordan told his story. "I haven't the least idea," he concluded, "whether the fire was accidental, or part of the plan; whether the men who ganged up on Hewitt intended to take the briefcase, or whether they expected it to go up in smoke."

Before the police sergeant could express an opinion, Jordan spilled the contents of the case on the consul's desk.

"By Jove! Aviation maps! Odd thing for a pearler's dummy to have."

"Damn odd," Jordan said. "Maybe you'll be asking the crew of the *Tatsu* what they know about it."

The sergeant grinned. "I daresay we shall."

The map collection covered the East Indies from Acheen to Timor, from Sumatra to North Borneo; there was nothing pertaining to Australia. "Dutch maps," Jordan pointed out. "Probably stolen from

some flier who didn't have too much sense."

"Really, now, you can't be too sure of that," the sergeant protested. "It needn't have come from carelessness."

"That's not what I mean. See those circles, marking spots that are off the airways? If you ask me, they're secret landing fields, part of the N.E.I. defense system. Maybe it's convenient, circling them that way, but it's bad stuff when a chart is stolen. Bonehead play, whether the Dutchman or Hewitt did it."

There was considerable speculation as to what lay behind the attack on the dummy. The best guess was that, coming ashore to pick up Australian Intelligence, Hewitt had quarreled with his local connections, perhaps about the price of information.

When the police left, Brady asked Jordan, "Why didn't you mention Marcelle Walraevens?"

"Because I don't want this business taken out of my hands. You saw what happened to the maps." He took time out to pencil a list of locations on a pad. "That is all I could remember, and you can bet I won't get a second look. Marcelle Walraevens is my private game. Fat chance I'll have of finding out what the police learn about the *Tatsu*."

The consul smiled thinly. "That blonde will be interesting work, Gil. But watch your step."

"What are you holding out?"

"Well, nothing. I looked her up while you were on the prowl. She's Belgian, papers all okay. Niece of Pieter van Moellen, district officer in Java."

"Then she'd come in handy. Rather, her uncle would."

"Too late. Van Moellen shot himself. Finances or health or general crack-up. The local police haven't wasted any time, finding out who Marcelle is and why."

Jordan sat up with the consul, waiting for a report on Hewitt. At four, they learned that the dummy was dead.

"Tell them," he said, before Brady could hang up the receiver, "to keep it quiet. The man's got to be brought back to life. I've been thinking it over, and there is a way of doing it."

"I don't like to be ribbed before sunrise!"

"This is on the level. Look here—" Jordan rose, stretched. "I'm just about Hewitt's size and general build. Same

general color. And they have a surgeon here, Major Walker, a regular wizard in the last war, rebuilding faces all shot to hell. Get it?"

"Sounds grand," was the ironic retort. "But you'd play hell, going back on the *Tatsu* and convincing the Japs that you're Hewitt."

"A dummy is a dummy," Jordan contended. "More than that, the *Tatsu* won't be waiting for Hewitt to get out of the hospital."

"Then I don't get the point," the consul said, wearily. "If the *Tatsu* was charting mines, if she is a floating headquarters for spies and carries them all over the N.E.I., it'd be a swell play, assuming you didn't get your throat cut before you hit

the next port. But you say the *Tatsu* won't wait. Then what?"

"Follow her. Meet her. Or on the way, pick up something better. A better lead. I want to find out if those circles on Hewitt's maps are secret Dutch landing fields, or Japanese hideouts. And I'm going to find out what's happening in Timor, somewhere between Dutch Koepang and Portuguese Dilhi. The Japs can't convince me that an airline from Palao to Dilhi can possibly pay. It's a front for dirty work, do you get it?

"Dirty work right on the main British airlines from Australia to Singapore, to India, to London. A nest of the yellow scum less than 600 miles from Darwin, and do I have to tell you Darwin is the Australian takeoff point for wherever else hell's going to pop up next?"

"You can go to Dilhi as yourself," the consul countered.

"Sure I can. But going as Hewitt, there is no telling what I'll run into."

"That is just what I meant, Gil," was the somber retort. "Look here, you're not a movie hero, you're a fellow with a job to do, plain, ordinary fact getting. This one-man suicide squad is crazy!"

Jordan held out his main reason because he needed the consul's influence with the local authorities; so he did not dare explain, at this stage, that he proposed to palm himself off on Marcelle Walraevens as Harry Hewitt. Hot as the hunch was, it simply could not stand up under the scrutiny of level-headed officials.

Brady went on, "The Dutch are plenty busy, they're a lot more aware of Jap penetration—peaceful penetration, if you have a taste for humor—than the United States."

"That's just it. They're not sure whether we'll help them or not when the lid blows off, so of course they're not telling family secrets. Hence my snooping. Now get busy, quit arguing, and sell my idea to the authorities, there's no time for code messages to Washington."

The consul rose, grinned bleakly. "Of course there's no time! You know they'd call you home for observation and treatment if they heard of it. Maybe you do need a new face, you ought to be tired of the one you've got."

III

JORDAN ended by establishing his case, though his own logic was not the deciding factor. What convinced the officer commanding the district was the report of the harbor patrol which set out perhaps a quarter of an hour after Hewitt reached the hospital; the *Tatsu* had left her anchorage.

Her actual owner, it seemed, did not wish to be interviewed about a dummy who carried a case of N.E.I. maps. Thus, since the Japs could not possibly know whether Hewitt had or had not died of his wounds, Jordan won himself a rebuilt face, and the prospect of some weeks in a private ward.

During the days which followed the plastic surgery, Jordan wondered what would happen to Jumbuck Charley's allegiance.

The blackboy might suspect outright imposture, or he might be terrified by the magic which could switch one man into the body of another. However, the major problem was Marcelle Walraevens, who fairly camped at the hospital.

Brady said, "We told her you'd live, but that you couldn't see anyone for Lord knows how long, that nothing but blood transfusions were keeping you alive. Gil, you're going to have something on your hands when that gal finally crashes the gate."

"Nothing to it!"

"That's what you think! She was in hysterics while you were supposed to be within arm's reach of death. She's wild about Hewitt. She hopes she can talk you out of your cockeyed ways. You're to reform, quit being a sundowner and a dummy and lord knows what else, and

you're going to have a job managing her uncle's rubber estate."

"I'm going to like that. Damn it, my face itches, when do I get rid of these bandages?"

"You're just itching to see Marcelle, and you're a crazy fool. Look here, she ought to be interned, or deported. You can't convince me she's on the level."

"Oh, hell, skip *that*. Cable Batavia for more dirt on her, so I can talk sense when she barges in and says, *darling, at long last!*"

"You think that's funny," Brady grumbled. "Suppose you don't really fool her, suppose she suspects you but just leads you on."

That, however, was part of Jordan's game. The more he heard about Marcelle's uncle, the more he was convinced that his hunch had been right. Pieter van Moellen's suicide had a nasty flavor, coming right after the failure of that Nazi coup to seize Batavia the very day that the Netherlands had been taken over. A code message from the mother country had saved the capital of the Indies; twenty Nazi ships seized, and a swarm of Nazis and Dutch traitors rounded up, perhaps an hour before they had a chance to use their cached arms.

"And there was a pro-Nazi element in Belgium as well as in Holland," Jordan told himself, during those weary days in which he considered every possible event and plan which could come out of his ultimate meeting with the lovely blonde. "Marcelle's uncle probably had his choice of either knocking himself off, or facing a firing squad."

With the war's crop of Pétains and Quislings, defeatists and traitors, it was easy enough to accept the idea of a Dutch official selling out to the Axis. And Hewitt's map case only clinched the argument; every sheet was confidential, and not merely the commercial charts Jordan had at first assumed them to be.

Then came the test; and to Jordan, it was like that moment before his first parachute jump. Logic told him that nothing could fail, yet he was dizzy and shaking from anticipation.

She came in, stood for a moment at the door, eyes very wide, and lips parted as for words that could not find utterance. Marcelle was even lovelier than his recollection of her. But he gave no sign of recognition; he flashed a puzzled glance at the nurse, and looked about him in perplexity.

Marcelle's expression changed. She caught the nurse's arm, but the woman in white slipped free, and retreated. When the door closed, Marcelle said, "Harry—"

The man she thought was a Japanese dummy closed his eyes, opened them, and slowly shook his head. "It's awfully nice of you to call, Miss—" He smiled, made a helpless gesture. "Do sit down."

"Don't you remember me? Oh, Harry, you must!"

Jordan sighed. "Everything's been a haze. There was a fire, and a blackboy pulled me out of it. So I'm Harry—Harry what?"

It had never occurred to Marcelle Walraevens that an encounter with knives could as readily addle a man's memory as a blow on the head. She knelt beside the wheel chair, and caught his hand. "You are Harry Hewitt."

"Harry Hewitt," Jordan echoed, mechanically. "That doesn't help a great deal."

"Don't you remember me? Am I not in the least familiar?"

He laid his hands along her cheeks, tilted her chin, stared for a long time into the anxious eyes. "Everythings a muddle. I know I've seen you somewhere—but where? And when?"

"I'm Marcelle Walraevens."

"Marcelle—Marcelle—" He caught her arm. "You'd better take a chair. I feel like a perfect ass, and you mustn't kneel there. Tell me something else. I know I'm in Darwin—they've nearly driven me crazy—the police, I mean, not the doctors."

Her face showed no alarm at that last; only anxiety. "But why, Harry?"

"Trying to make me remember who stabbed me. I must have been robbed. There wasn't any identification."

"Oh, but they did know your name," she corrected. "The Chinese girl at the desk. You left a note for me."

As a matter of fact, Marcelle had left a message for Hewitt. But he said, "Maybe if I saw it, I might remember."

She dug into the cosmetics and cigarettes of her handbag, and found a sheet of hotel stationery. It was signed "H. H.", and proposed dinner. He eyed it, thrust it into the pocket of his robe, and asked, "Did you meet me?"

"Of course. You got my message in Dilhi, saying we'd meet in Darwin. And when you call at the hotel, I was out. When I returned, you'd left. I couldn't wait, I had to see some people off at the airport, so I left a note for you. And then we met, and then someone phoned you, and you had to leave."

"But why? Right in the midst of dinner?"

"No, they'd served our brandy."

"Must have been fearfully important!"

"You said it was," Marcelle agreed. "Darling, I sat up day and night, waiting—waiting—those doctors kept me frantic—first they said there was no hope, then that there was—"

"And to top it, I didn't remember you!"

She sighed. "That doesn't matter. You will remember. Here, or when we go back to Java."

"We will go back—when did I leave, and why?"

She told him the date; it was the month of that almost successful Nazi coup. Apparently he had not been wanted by the police else Marcelle would not speak so confidently of his return. Perhaps he was an unexposed traitor, due to return and carry on fifth column activities.

Thinking again of the map case, he asked, "Was there nothing to identify me at the hospital? What happened to my luggage, how did I get here?"

"Nothing, only that note. The Chinese receptionist identified you."

"How did I get here? To Darwin, I mean?"

"You were on a pearling boat. You'd written me from Rabaul, from Port Moresby, from Koepang. Don't you remember any of those places?"

When the nurse came in to tell Marcelle that her visiting time was up, Jordan decided that the first round was a draw; though he had tricked her into speaking of life in Batavia, and of her uncle, and of the plantation, he had won no advantage. Certainly there had been no chance to work maps into the discussion, nor Uncle Pieter's suicide. He had the complex task of regaining his memory, bit by bit, and in such a way as to keep Marcelle wondering at his progress.

Brady came in a moment after Marcelle left. He said, "Not a bad act, Gil. Boy, I could feel for you at times."

Jordan mopped his forehead. "Could have been worse. What do you make of that dame?"

The consul gave him a shrewd look. "You want me to say I think she's on the up and up."

"I want facts. But it would be grand if she is really on the level."

"Steady, Gil! Maybe your act was good, and maybe she's cagey. My bet is that she won't get to brass tacks till you've recovered enough to get out of British territory."

MEANWHILE, word had come in that the registration papers of the late Harry Hewitt were forged; apparently, they had been procured for use ashore when the *Tatsu* was in Australian waters. No one had ever heard of him in Cairns, Queensland, his supposed home.

For a whole week, Marcelle Walraevens struggled with Jordan's treacherous memory. Bit by bit, she revealed the surface

details of Hewitt's friendship with her late uncle; and finally, a British agent in Batavia cabled his findings. Pierre van Moellen's participation in the Nazi coup, though suspected, had not been proved. The implication was that his suicide had blocked the investigation.

Then, one afternoon, as Jordan and Marcelle sat in the area of the new hospital, the next move was staged. Jumbuck Charlie came stalking in with a briefcase whose leather was dark with dried blood. The blackboy carefully coached, headed straight for the convalescing dummy.

"This tucker bag belong you," he announced. "How much you give me for new-hear paper?"

"What's he saying?" Marcelle asked.

"He thinks it's mine." Then, to Charlie, "How fashion, what pidgin?"

The blackboy explained that he was the one who had dragged Jordan from the burning shack; that he had kept the "tucker bag" as an immediate reward, but since it had proved to be utterly useless to him, he was bringing it back, having heard that the owner had survived.

"You understand that gibberish?" Marcelle exclaimed, incredulously.

Jordan shrugged. "Somehow, it came to me. See what's in it."

Instinctively, she obeyed; and Jordan knew that he had sold her the idea of thinking for him. He watched her fumble with the buckles. Her hands trembled, and her face became tense for just a moment. Then she looked up and said, "Why, it's full of maps."

"Belong master," the blackboy insisted.

"Shake it out, Marcelle. I'm still stumped."

She emptied the case, and probed the compartments. Without a wasted move, she found the secret pocket, and Harry Hewitt's wallet, the wallet which Jordan and the consul had planted. Then she scooped a handful of silver from her handbag, and paid the blackboy.

As Charlie left, Jordan asked her, "Did I have that case the night I met you at the hotel?"

Marcelle shook her head. "I never saw it before."

"What's in the wallet?"

"Some money. Here, you look."

He thumbed the bills, then took out Harry Hewitt's registration card. Jordan shook his head. "It still makes no sense. I'm supposed to be from Cairns. And what would I be doing with those maps?"

"You'll remember. I know you will, once we're in Java again."

Jordan frowned. "I have Koepang on the brain. I don't know why, but I have. Suppose we leave tomorrow, and stop in Koepang?"

He was sure that Marcelle had recognized the briefcase; that the first sight of it had been a shock; and his next move was to find out why.

"We'll go. I know you'll remember, and then I won't be so lonesome. Harry, darling, it'll be terrible, day after day, wondering if your memory will ever come back."

He laughed softly. "My dear, discovering you all over is better than just remembering you. Two thrills instead of one."

IV

KOEPANG, on the Savu Sea; the uttermost east of the Dutch Indies, where Chinese junks and Buginese *prahus* came for coffee and sandalwood, beeswax and sturdy Timor ponies. Though November and the dry season would soon end, the southeast monsoon still cooled the town, and reached into the screened veranda of Hotel des Indes, where Marcelle and Jordan sat, trying to revive a dead man's memory.

"It does come back to me," he said, after a silence he had stretched in order to nerve himself for the final plunge. "You'd done good work, back there in Batavia, and I'd promised you a chance—to meet—to meet——"

"The Master of Dragons," she cut in breathlessly, when his groping put her on edge. "The Society of the Black Dragon."

"Black Dragon," he repeated, like a mechanical toy, echoing the name of the Japanese order of assassins, the society which had murdered Prime Minister Hara in 1921 for agreeing to the Washington Naval Treaty, and had followed up, ten years later, by killing Hamaguchi, the minister who had signed the London Naval Treaty.

Kokuryuke, the "Black Dragon River," was a patriotic society which settled every Japanese official who protested against conquest and imperialism; they had bombed Admiral Suzuki, the Grand Chamberlain; the Keeper of the Seal, Baron Makino; Yoshisawa, the Foreign Minister. Whoever weakened in the march of conquest was exterminated, and though the membership of this fanatic order was nominally secret, its leader was known, and its agents, when arrested, were invariably acquitted.

Nor was there any reason to suppose that the tide would swerve if a white statesman became troublesome, though thus far, the Dragons had confined themselves to weak-hearted Nipponese pacifists. The Black Dragon had won public fancy; after the massacres of 1936, in which Admiral Saito, General Watanabe, and Finance Minister Takahashi had perished, more than a million citizens had signed petitions begging clemency for the convicted patriot-assassins.

A thousand of these petitions had been signed in blood. Nine had been accompanied by fingers which the signers had chopped from their own hands; for, as usual, one of the assassins had committed *hari-kari* to prove that he was a man of honor, acting only for the good of Japan.

And now Marcelle Walraevens hoped to prod the memory of Harry Hewitt, so that he could keep his promise, and put her in touch with the Master of Dragons.

"You know what that means?" he challenged.

She nodded. "Yes. But all war is killing for a result. You think that because I'm a woman I couldn't help, couldn't be useful? Harry, you promised!"

"Why don't you go to Japan?" he retorted. "Mitimuri Toyama lives outside of Tokyo."

"You're being evasive," she said, petulantly. "You know very well that'd be absurd. Where is the Master assigned to the Indies?"

"Would he stay in one place?"

"Mmm—no, not necessarily."

"Well, then! I've changed my mind. What mind I have left to change. It's no task for a woman."

Marcelle rose. "So that is all a promise means!"

Jordan shrugged, struck a match, answered her angry glance with one of indifference; but behind his stolid front he was sick and dismayed. He could understand a Nazi-fied Belgian; he had been in intelligence work long enough to realize that traitors were where you found them, and that while some were mercenary, others were thrill seekers, and a percentage were sincere fanatics. This he could take at a gulp, but that any white person could swallow the principles of the Black Dragon, much less seek a chance to be an agent of that society of assassins, was somewhat too much.

Nazi and Jap; two of a kind, except for a difference in stature and color. Uncle Pieter, he told himself, must have committed suicide as an acknowledgment of failure, rather than to avoid arrest. And now his niece wished to carry on.

Jordan caught Marcelle's arm. "Don't go off your chump, really, I'm still foggy about so many things. Uncle Pieter—"

"He has nothing to do with this!"

"Oh, very well. I'll be going to Dilhi in the morning. Hope you have a nice trip to Batavia."

"So that's all promises mean to you!"

She jerked free of his grasp; head high, she went toward the lounge. Gil Jordan

stepped to the terrace, where he hailed a cab.

AT THE waterfront, he dismissed the Malay chauffeur and set out on foot. He wanted to get in touch with Jumbuck Charley, who had taken deck passage from Darwin. While the powerful blackboy was no mental giant, he had much more intelligence than anyone suspected an Australian abo of having; and then there was his animal instinct for trailing, and his ability to survive in the wildest country. In the event that Jordan's mission ended as Harry Hewitt's had, Charley could get back to Darwin to tell the consul where Jordan had last been seen. It was not that a secret agent felt the necessity of a tombstone and epitaph; it was just a matter of giving the service and his successor a lead to the next move.

He found the blackboy working with a gang of native stevedores, loading potatoes on a tramp steamer. The men of Timor were nearly as tall as Jumbuck Charley, muscular brutes with cunning little eyes, and kinky hair; they were only a shade paler than the Papuans of New Guinea, and like their savage kinsmen, they wore carved bones thrust in their noses and ear lobes. A wild pack, untamed by the Dutch, and among them, an Australian abo would not get a second look.

Jordan strolled past. Charley, leaving his fellows, trotted after him, chattering and gesturing. He had a long, skewer-like hairpin of carved marine ivory, and when he overtook Jordan, he made a convincing pretense of selling the scrimshaw work. Jordan frowned, shook his head, made as if to walk away, but the stubborn abo followed. Presently, when they were some yards beyond earshot, Jordan asked, "Learn anything interesting?"

"Japs behind Dilhi, fields where fire birds make corroboree."

A convention of airplanes? That was not surprising. After working with a crew of natives, Jumbuck Charley could hardly help but get a fairly accurate picture of what went on in the interior of Timor, where neither Dutch nor Portuguese had more than nominal authority.

As Jordan paid Charley for the carved ivory, he said, "Have everything ready. Maybe we'll go through the bush to Dilhi, maybe we go in a *prahu*."

The blackboy grinned, and trotted back to join his fellows.

Jordan resumed his stroll, noting that Japanese fishing boats and the pearlers that had put into Koepang for what they called supplies. He wondered how long the *Tatsu* would be working the reefs about Dilhi, and where she would take her cargo of shell—and if she had a new dummy for her next cruise into Australian waters.

Marcelle, he began to realize, had turned out to be a lovely time-waster; her insistence on getting the inside track of a Japanese spy ring whose agent she supposed him to be had become an obsession. He had made no progress in prying her loose from the information he was certain that she must have. Thus, to get the results he had hoped to win from his facial remodelling, he had to devise a new approach.

But he had gained one thing from the sea voyage from Darwin: Marcelle, doing her best to revive his memory, had inadvertently set him right on details of the personality he had assumed; he would be a much more convincing Harry Hewitt when he finally caught up with the *Tatsu*. The outstanding obstacle would be his in-

ability to call his former associates by name.

Now he was back in the heart of Koepang, among the Chinese shops, the *godowns,* the shipping offices. Against the sun reddening sky, an Imperial Airways plane spread black wings, and blotted out the sinking sun as she circled into the wind to land. He'd wheedle Marcelle into better humor, make one more attempt to penetrate her background, and then, unless he secured some direct information, he'd head for Dilhi.

Or so he planned, until a burly Dutchman in khaki uniform accosted him. "Just a moment, *Mynheer* Hewitt," the officer said in accented English. "Or do you prefer to be addressed as *Herr* Berger?"

This last was bad; and what made it worse was that two Malays in uniform had stepped from a shop door. Without speaking, they separated, placing themselves behind Jordan, one on each side.

He shrugged, and amiably answered the officer, "I don't have a great deal of choice, call me whatever you please. But I am Harry Hewitt. My papers—"

"I know all about your papers. The Resident wishes to speak to you."

AT THIS hour, every official should be at his home or his club. Only an emergency could permit an interview to break into *pahit* drinking. And being addressed as Berger had a nasty flavor. Jordan, stepping into the open car which had rolled from the alley at the left, saw not a chance for a break; they had him hemmed in.

"What does the Resident want to discuss?" Jordan asked when he was wedged in between the solid Dutchman and one of the Malay police.

"He'll tell you quickly enough. Don't be impatient. And don't bother telling him that you are a British subject."

The Resident's office was on a headland near Fort Concordia. Malay soldiers presented arms as the car rolled through the gate. Jordan had scarcely stepped into the hall of the white building than an orderly accosted the party and said to the officer, "*Mynheer* van Houten is waiting."

Any Dutchman who waited at his desk until sunset would be prejudiced.

Mynheer van Houten was one of the few lean Hollanders Jordan had ever seen; a long nosed, sharp eyed man who sat with military erectness beneath a ceiling fan; a tight-mouthed man who looked as if he had never heard of compromises. "Sit down, Berger," he said, gesturing.

"Your Excellency, everyone insists on calling me Berger. If you'll just glance at my papers, or even send for someone at the hotel to identify me."

Van Houten smiled sourly. "Come, come! I'm in a hurry. You are Erich Berger—" He riffled a sheaf of documents on his desk. "You're no more English than I am. I grant you have a convincing accent. Just as neat as it was in Batavia. We didn't suspect you of being one of that Nazi crowd we rounded up, not until a few days ago. And by then, we had lost all hope of matching up with you."

"I've just left Darwin," Jordan retorted.

Van Houten nodded. "And very stupidly prowled around Netherlands territory. If you are not Erich Berger—"

He picked the first of several photographs from his file. "Who is this?"

The likeness was excellent; Harry Hewitt, sitting in a parked car, and talking to a square jawed man with a cropped mustache. In the background were buildings and shop signs to identify the locale—the main stem of Batavia. Van Houten went on, "There are others, but never mind them. Your companion is the late Friedrich Schwarz, alias Jan Deblauw."

Jordan did not like the emphasis on *late.* Van Houten had an unpleasant way of pronouncing the word, and an unpleasant gleam in his fish-gray eyes. He sighed, shook his head perplexedly. "*Mynheer,* this is all rather thick. I never saw Schwarz-Deblauw."

"Oh, very well, very well! Categorical denial, of course. But wasting my time won't help you. Schwarz was shot while resisting arrest just a week ago. Unfortunate for us, lucky for his associates. You weren't so self-sacrificing."

"See here, Your Excellency!" Jordan thrust out his hands, palms up. "Fingerprint me and you will quickly learn your error."

Van Houten leaped to his feet, laughed triumphantly. He turned to the arresting officer. "You heard that? He asks us to fingerprint him, the fool!" Then, to Jordan, "You have confirmed the identification in the surest way you could, and with a piece of stupidity we could never have hoped for. Our record on Erich Berger alias Harry Hewitt is quite lacking in that detail; your file mysteriously disappeared. Doubtless you can explain that."

JORDAN began to feel that he had not been any too brilliant in trying to use Marcelle Walraevens as a stalking horse; he was convinced now that she had come to Darwin to trap a dangerous spy, and that he had thrust himself into the net. And the unwritten law of the intelligence service was that when an operator got himself into a jam, he had to extricate himself, and without crying to Uncle Sam for help. For the past few minutes, Jordan had been feeling lonesome, desperately alone.

"I cannot explain any of these things, Your Excellency. Let us get to the point—what do you propose doing? And may I get in touch with my consul?"

"There is no German consulate in the Indies, Berger. And if you refer to the British consul, I can only say that you must be expecting a miracle. We are holding you for examination and trial by a military commission. As a Nazi spy, you must realize that there is only one penalty we can consider."

"Then why all this blasted debate? According to you, I am convicted already, and the commission is merely a formality."

Van Houten smiled. "Splendid, Berger. Now that we understand each other—" He clapped his hands. He said to the Malay servant who came trotting in, "Brandy—gin—cigars! *Jalen! Jalen!*"

The Malay's return broke the silence that had followed the call for refreshments. He poured for van Houten, then asked Jordan, *"Pahit, tuan?* Brandy, *tuan?"*

Jordan took the latter, swirled his drink, cocked an ironic eye. "Here's to the firing squad. Sunrise, or do you have floodlights?"

Van Houten leaned back and laughed heartily. "Please, Berger! It is perhaps not so serious. Good health, sir." He lifted his own glass, downed the mighty noggin of Bols. Then, "All you have to do is tell us what we would have learned from the late Friedrich Schwarz alias Jan Deblauw, had some oaf of an agent not shot him. Simple, eh? I give you my word—be frank and there will be no firing squad."

"May I have another drink?"

"Surely, and welcome."

When the glass was full, Jordan raised it and said, "I drink to the health and continued success of a lovely and talented lady, Marcelle Walraevens."

V

EUROPEANS being scarce in Koepang, the jail had been built exclusively for the native trade. Jordan had barely heard the key turn behind him when he wondered why the Resident had bothered to mention the firing squad as a threat. There was an opium sodden Chinese, two red-eyed Malays who had been clubbed out of the notion of running amuck; though the outstanding odor was contributed by two frizzy-haired natives who made a violet out of Jumbuck Charley.

Jordan's skin began to crawl before he had fairly seated himself on the filthy floor. A jailbreak would require tools and time, for the masonry and the bars were substan-

tial as the *rijstafel* that the officials were even now tucking home.

Jordan passed his cigarettes around. The two Malays thanked him with the dignity of *rajas* or *datus*. Then sullen silence closed in again.

As nearly as he could reason it out, Harry Hewitt alias Erich Berger had, until the past few weeks, been entirely in the clear, and, just to maintain pleasant and useful connections, he had while assuming the character of pearler's dummy, kept in touch with Marcelle Walraevens. But whether the lovely blonde, finally learning that Hewitt was a Nazi agent, had staged a magnificent act to lure him, Jordan, to Dutch territory, or whether she was really an ally who might even now be under arrest, he could not say.

"Marvelous impersonation," the captive glumly told himself. "Even if I tried to convince him I'm a fake, he'd say that I must've been close to the wrong side to get to first base with Marcelle."

The Resident, naturally prejudiced against Nazis, was a small scale king in isolated Koepang. With the Japs being coddled by the cagey Portuguese on the other side of the island, one could hardly blame van Houten for being tough and narrow minded.

Then Jordan learned how trifles can conquer large issues; he was certain that every kind of vermin known to the Indies had scented new bait. Slapping and scratching exhausted him; he doubted that there was a single square inch of his body which did not itch and burn and crawl with indignation.

The Malays and the natives were snoring. The one white prisoner seemed to have drawn all the fire. He squirmed himself to exhaustion, and passed out. He was awakened by the cool of dawn, and by the Malays, who knelt, facing Holy Mecca to pray.

The jailer brought rice, and small dried fish which smelled like zoological specimens, not any too well cured. Presently, soldiers came, and one of the two Malays rose to go with them. He said to his comrade, and to the others, *"Selamaat jingal!"*

Peaceful tarrying; and the answer was, "Peaceful journeying." Jordan gave the man a cigarette, and they let him light it. By then he understood, nor was he surprised when, a few minutes later, he heard the braying of a bugle, the tramp of marching men. Then someone began to publish orders in Dutch.

A command followed. There was a crisp volley, the zing of a ricochet slug; the single, stifled burp of a pistol, and after the *coup de grâce* to make sure that the man was finished, there was another command and the tramp of feet.

This preview was not especially cheering.

Later, he was glad to see Jumbuck Charley, who came to bring mangoes and cigarettes, but his heart sank as the loyal fellow delivered the gifts.

In less than half an hour, Jordan's premonition was justified. The blackboy returned, this time under guard. Not even a bird-brained abo could show any friendliness to the supposed Hewitt alias Berger and remain at large.

"You blockhead," he grumbled, when Charley joined him in the corner of the cell, "why didn't you go home like I told you?"

"Him belong proper, see master," he stubbornly repeated, and that was that.

"Well, they probably won't shoot *you*," Jordan had to admit. "Is the white *lubra* in jail?"

Jumbuck Charley said that Marcelle had checked out, destination unknown. The mystery blonde had vanished, leaving all her luggage in her room.

"And that," Jordan told himself, "is another cartridge for the firing squad."

AROUND mid-afternoon, soldiers marched him back to see the Resident. Van Houten was pleasant and persuasive, though words and music had not changed:

talk, or else. He concluded, "You see, Berger, I do not even ask you why Marcelle Walraevens disappeared. The presumption is that she feared your revelations. Merely having arrived on the same boat which brought you from Darwin would not in itself implicate her."

"She is the niece of the late Pieter van Moellen."

But van Houten was not to be tricked into comment. He cocked an ironic eye at the grimy and unshaven captive, and said, "Let us not change the subject. I want a complete list of your associates. How did you enjoy the ceremonies at sunrise?"

"Grand! Any time you're ready, Your Excellency."

Van Houten smiled, rubbed his hands. "Take him away, Sergeant."

Back in his cell, Jordan found one slender thread of hope—a dead man cannot talk, and the Resident was itching for information. Van Houten was waiting for jail and suspense to crack his prisoner, make him blurt it all out.

Telling about the *Tatsu* and her crew might win a stay of execution. If Jordan could take his flimsy knowledge and build a story plausible enough to interest the Resident, there would be a delay until a Dutch gunboat could round up the pearler.

Habit makes people careless; guards are very cautious with a new prisoner, but they are bound to relax after having marched the same bedraggled captive from jail to Residency, day after day. Since a break from this solid little fortress was too absurd to consider, Jordan had to risk a bold move, such as bowling over a couple of soldiers and gambling on their marksmanship.

"Confession at night," he said to himself. "That stall might work."

He felt better, now that the shock of failure and arrest had begun to wear off. And with his brain clicking again, he realized that Jumbuck Charley had possibilities. No white man ever had understood the strange gifts of the Australian abo, and most outsiders were plainly skeptical. A blackboy could scent water in the desert; he could follow a cold trail, and orient himself even when the five normal senses could not function. In captivity, he perished from causes that no one ever had explained. An abo, like a Maori, could "will" himself to death, or whether it was a conscious and determined withholding of vitality, neither Jordan nor any other white man could say. Yet the fact remained that a blackboy's ten cents worth of brains had something which people even one grade higher on the scale of evolution lacked.

"Jumbuck," he said to the abo, "one fellow boy die, other fellow come get."

The abo, finally catching the point, admitted that a man could will himself into a state of temporarily suspended animation, stopping short of breaking the cord which links the self and the body.

The big fellow rose, and planted himself against the cell door. What followed was beyond Jordan's perceptions. Charley's chin drooped to his chest. The other prisoners, who had paid no attention to the pidgin chatter in the corner, suddenly became uneasy. The Malay rolled his eyes; the Papuans exchanged glances, looked up at the slanting red rays of the sun.

Something inexplicable was happening. Jumbuck Charley's posture had scarcely changed, yet he no longer gave the impression of a man wholly relaxed in sleep. The light ceased dancing on his oiled ribs. He had stopped breathing.

Fascinated, Jordan crouched there; he knew that life had slowly oozed out of that seven foot hulk; that the knotted muscles of those enormous arms and boxcar back had lost the intangible something which had animated them.

He knew this with the certainty which old doctors and peace officers have when they come upon a corpse and shake their heads, dismissing at once the possibility that they are looking at one who is merely in a deep coma. It was not anything which

the eye could see, or which the ear could hear. He could not deny his conviction, in spite of the fact that the thing was utterly impossible!

The seven foot hulk sagged a little, and toppled, slowly; inanimate muscles, having only a mechanical flexibility, at first hampered the collapse. Jumbuck Charley thumped to his side and lay there, head twisted at a crazy angle.

The Malay muttered, "He has gone to the mercy of Allah."

The frizzy headed Papuans squirmed uneasily as brief dusk made a purplish maze of the cell. They feared the dead, and particularly one who had died as this man had. Now that he had left his seven-foot frame, Jumbuck Charley was a menace which had to be propitiated.

They began to chant; a low, guttural sound, shaped far down in their chests.

And Jordan wondered if Jumbuck Charley could return, or whether, seeing the hopelessness of it all, he had taken a one-way trip. He crept across the floor to touch the greasy black hide. It had a clammy feel. The temperature was dropping, and more rapidly than in normal death.

Jordan recoiled, shivering. Then he drew a long breath. To hell with van Houten and his firing squad. He'd bluff van Houten to a finish. The Resident's third degree had suddenly lost its force; Jumbuck Charley's casual control of life had given him a new command of himself.

VI

MARCELLE WALRAEVENS held her head very high until she passed through the latticed swinging doors of the anteroom which led from the main hall to her bedroom. Then she cracked under the long accumulated sense of failure and frustration whose existence she had thus far sturdily denied.

A good cry was in order. Ambush in Darwin had been bad enough, amnesia worse; and now Harry Hewitt was turning against her. She wondered if he could by any chance have suspected the truth about Uncle Pieter.

Marcelle had too much iron in her soul to relish tears and self-pity for very long. She sat up, eyed herself in the mirror, and hastily dabbled her face with cold water. Before her make-up was fairly restored the front door swung open.

"What is it?"

The boy answered, "A gentleman wishes to see you. *Senhor* da Silva."

"I don't want to see anyone!"

Then another cut in: "Only for a moment, if you please."

The speaker had a smooth voice; while Dutch was not his native tongue, he was sure of himself, and his accent was that of one whose collection of languages gave him an international inflection. After a moment, Marcelle said, "Then come in."

A final touch of lipstick, and she stepped into the anteroom. Mr. da Silva was slight and swarthy, with glowing black eyes, and very white teeth, and a waxed mustache. He not only bowed double, but insisted on kissing her hand.

"I am sure it must be important," she said pointedly, and did not ask him to be seated.

"Please forgive the intrusion." He put his hat on the table. "Just one little moment." Then, coming near enough to drench her with the reek of hair tonic, he whispered, "It is Mr. Hewitt. He is leaving Koepang."

Marcelle shrugged. "I am sure that that is his privilege."

"But you do not understand. He leaves without notice. And against his will, he does not tell you."

"Why should he tell me?"

"Come, come! Do not pretend. If you two attempted to leave together, it would be stopped. His affairs have been going badly, this town is not the place for him. He has enemies. But I, Joao da Silva, make

arrangements. He will recover his memory in Dilhi, do you understand?"

He watched her face change, and he laughed softly. "But of course it is now clear to you. Come at once, I have arranged."

"I'll pack in a minute."

"*Pack!* God in Heaven, did *he* pack? No! Walk out with only a parasol and handbag. Or must I draw pictures? Those Dutch aviation charts that he nearly lost in Darwin—is Koepang any place for them to be found?"

Marcelle started. Then Hewitt had not destroyed the maps! He must have lost more than his memory. "Wait, I'll get my hat."

In a moment, she was at his side again. Da Silva said, "Chat gaily about a drive to Batu Anjo."

A car was waiting at the terrace. Without instructions, the Portuguese driver headed westward along the shore, below Fort Concordia, and then inland, along the narrow river which emptied into the bay. At high water, vessels of light draught could go some miles up to load wheat and potatoes grown on the interior plateau.

The car pulled up at a sleek launch which was moored at a bamboo jetty. "He is already aboard," da Silva said, leading the way. "Thank God, we are organized."

The chauffeur followed Marcelle to the gleaming deck. She had barely entered the tiny cabin than the engine roared. Its powerful drive shot the trim hull so swiftly toward the center of the stream that Marcelle was flung against a teak bulkhead.

Da Silva apologized, and ceremoniously. Marcelle, ignoring the hand at her elbow, glanced about. There could not be any other quarters; the remainder of the launch must be packed with engine and fuel tanks.

"Where is Mr. Hewitt?"

Da Silva gestured. "Please forgive me. They moved too fast. He was arrested before I could get in touch with him. Gendarmes and soldiers were marching him to the Residency, I was too late. So, I wasted no time. I dared not tell you, I feared you would be foolish enough to try to help him. Surely they are already looking for you."

The engine was whining now; the thin hull drummed and vibrated from the terrific pounding. Da Silva cursed, shouted to the man at the wheel, "Careful of driftwood, you fool!"

She darted in and out among fishing boats, Chinese junks, houseboats; already Kera Island's low, sandy stretch was looming up, six miles offshore.

Marcelle stood there, legs braced against the heave of the deck. She was stunned, bewildered; she looked as if she had been clubbed just short of unconsciousness. Da Silva regarded her for a moment, shook his head, and said, "I am sorry, truly sorry. We did our best."

"I want to go back! I can't leave him this way!" Her voice rose; she turned on da Silva, caught his arms as though to shake sense into him. "I can help him more than anyone else could."

Da Silva sighed. "I am distressed, please believe me. But he is beyond help. All you could do would be to talk too much."

"That's my business, my risk!"

"Ah, but it is not. There are others concerned. Mr. Hewitt—Mr. Berger, if you prefer, is an officer, and he will not be browbeaten or bribed into betraying his friends. You women—forgive me, but I must say it, you have just now proved how little sense you have.

"Instead of going to Dilhi and safety, you prefer to stay in Koepang. Do you think they would show you any consideration?"

Marcella pulled herself together. There was no resisting da Silva's logic, and certainly she could not swim ashore; not in these shark-infested waters of the Timor Coast.

"Oh, God, they'll shoot him!" she said to herself. "He won't ever talk, not even if he remembers—"

VII

THE eerie sounds that came from Jordan's cell presently attracted the jailer's attention. He came down the corridor, snapped on a light, and demanded, "Why this noise? It is forbidden, little brothers. If the *tuan besar* hears of this you will all be flogged. Maybe you will go on half rations, though Allah is the Knower."

The kinky-headed Papuans began to jabber and point at the corpse. The Malays said, "This man has gone to the mercy of *Allah,* it is not good to leave him here, it is not *adat,* it is not fitting."

Adat, the Malay code of things which are and are not done, is the world's closest approach to British tradition; it has the force of law. From Negri Sembilan to the easternmost reach of the Malay race, the custom governs, so the jailer was disturbed by this reference. He frowned, and reluctantly countered, "It is not permitted, the doctor *tuan* must decide if this man is sick enough to go to the hospital."

"But he is dead!"

"That is not probable."

"Is he breathing? Does he move? By Allah, he is cold. And bring us water for ceremonial washing, we touched him and now we are unclean for having laid hands on a corpse."

Disturbing the Dutch officials or doctors without sound cause was not to the jailer's taste. Then he brightened. "This man died after sunset, at the start of a new day. As long as he is buried before the coming sunset, custom is not broken."

This was not going as well as Jordan had hoped. He said, "O Pilgrim, is it not written, *even poultry are kings in their own domain?* This cell is our proper place, it is for the living, not the dead."

The Malay captives eyed the new Solomon who had come to judgment. One said, "The *tuan* is right! You do us wrong, and the tradition says, *who wounds must heal: who slays must replace: who sells must restore.*"

It was not a case of prisoner against jailer; it was rather a matter of a Malay confronted by the majesty of *adat,* yet he made one more attempt: "Lengthwise you go through, crosswise you are broken."

"O Pilgrim," Jordan resumed, "you are using our own words. In leaving a corpse with us, you go crosswise. And if this man is not dead, then it is even worse, failing to call a doctor."

So the jailer went to get in touch with his chief.

Jordan shifted to the corner nearest the door. He was not any too sure of his cell mates; while all, and especially the Malay whose fellow had faced the firing squad, should be ready for a break, one thin little hunch kept him from taking them into his confidence. He had not, during the night preceding the execution, heard the condemned man make any reference to his impending doom. Regardless of Moslem resignation, that did not ring true. It was just possible that the firing squad, with all its accompaniment of martial music and the tromping of feet, had been to crack a white man's morale. The survivor might be a stooge.

And selling an idea to the frizzy-headed Papuans was risky; he did not know what sentence they faced, nor could he speak their dialect. So, it had to be a lone play.

To abandon Jumbuck Charley to the enemy did go against the grain, but once Jordan made his break, he felt the black-

boy would be of no further use to the Dutch, and they would presently release him. Certainly they would not hold him as a spy or give him any heavy penalty for having associated with a supposed Nazi agent.

Within half an hour, a white-clad doctor and a police official came down the corridor. The latter said, "These damned aborigines! If you ask me, the fellow was scared silly and willed himself to death."

The doctor snorted. "Nonsense, Haussman! Though he may have been frightened to death."

He did not bother to elaborate on the fine distinction. His real reason for coming was to find out whether Jumbuck Charley had died of a contagious ailment. The official said to the four Malay soldiers, "*Nuh! Majid!* Go in and get him. The rest of you stand by, just in case of monkey business."

He selected a key from the ring which the jailer handed him. The lead pair of the guard set their rifles against the wall, while the other two, weapons at the ready, covered the cell. This was a detail which Jordan had not expected.

"Back in the corner!" the official commanded.

The prisoners obeyed. Dutch thoroughness was blocking Jordan from the start.

For a pair of five and a half foot Malays to move the giant abo's limp hulk was a task. He buckled in the middle; and the stocky little brown men could not lift either end high enough to get him clear of the floor. The official grumbled, "Damn it, drag him! Hurry up!"

The door opened wider for the grunting guards. The doctor exclaimed, "I do believe he is dead!" and stepped forward for a close look.

That was when Jordan took off. Two things helped him; first, professional curiosity, the abrupt move and the exclamation, which for an instant distracted the armed men; and then Jordan had another advantage. The guards did not know that a break was on the way. Two rifles covered four scattered targets, and in uncertain light.

Jordan was halfway to the mark when the guards cut loose. The Malay prisoner and the two Papuans scattered, howling. Jordan crashed against the bars of the open door, slamming it against the official's shoulder.

The startled men who tugged at Jumbuck Charley were good for nothing but to block the jailer. By the time the police official jerked his pistol, Gil Jordan had knocked the doctor off balance, and sent him crashing athwart the guards. The shots they jerked spattered against the ceiling.

Jordan snatched one of the rifles which stood against the wall; the other crashed to the floor. Surprise still favored him. He reached the end of the corridor before a slug whisked past him.

JUST as he skidded around an angle, a white man in uniform came dashing out of an office. Jordan made a butt strike with his captured rifle, blocking the man's draw, and knocking him to the floor. Another bound brought the fugitive to the street, which was still dark and empty, for the blasts inside the jail had not yet registered on the occupants of adjoining buildings.

Had a boat been waiting, Jordan could have put out into the darkness of Koepang Bay; as it was, his game of hide and seek would have to be played in the jungle, and in the untouched interior. His chances of survival were slender, yet, as he had seen things from behind the bars, a lot better than trying to convince van Houten that this was a case of mistaken identity.

Then Jordan got a surprise which equalled the one he had given the jailers. Hearing the voice behind him, he understood the rising pitch of the uproar from within the building. The big bulk that was silhouetted against the lighted doorway for an instant was Jumbuck Charley, rifle in hand.

The abo stretched his long legs, overtaking Jordan in a few bounds, and then gasped, "Got boat!"

He shouldered Jordan down an alley, knocked him off balance, and as he yanked him to his feet, he repeated, "Got boat."

Hell now boiled over in the vicinity of the jail, and the alarm was being relayed from one end of Koepang to the other. An air raid siren began to whine. "Boat," Jordan panted, as he followed Jumbuck Charley into the darkness of the waterfront *godowns*, "so have they. Better head for the bush."

Judging from the sounds, the pursuit was heading away, and toward the mouth of the river. Jordan's first guess was that the other prisoners, taking advantage of their chance, were in the confusion distracting the spy hunt. The blackboy's unexpected recovery from his mysterious coma inclined Jordan to follow the abo's lead, so he raced after him.

Somewhere along the harbor, an engine roared. A searchlight lanced the darkness. Jumbuck Charley was now near the berth of the tramp steamer which had been taking on a cargo of potatoes.

"God, if this is his idea of a boat!" Jordan groaned. "Listen, you idiot—"

Then he saw the long, lean hull of an outriggered *prahu*. Shoving off was a matter of seconds. As Jordan dug in with a paddle, the blackboy hoisted the three cornered sail.

Its rattan matting, unlike white canvas, would be invisible in the gloom.

A speedboat raced toward the river mouth, searchlight ablaze, siren wailing. Just why the harbor patrols had decided that the fugitives would leave from that quarter was beyond Jordan, but he was not asking questions. He was entirely too busy riding the outrigger which kept the shallow hull from capsizing.

She raced through the gloom. Half drowned by spray, Jordan clung to the outrigger arm, sometimes pulling himself inboard a little, again crawling out, balancing the treacherous craft to accord with Jumbuck Charley's tacking.

Silent, invisible, the *prahu* skimmed among the reefs which would be sure death for any patrol launch, or for any boat that had a keel. Though the British Admiralty Pilot, *Eastern Archipelago, Part II,* said that vessels should not pass within the line joining Tikus and Burung Islands, three miles offshore, Jumbuck Charley could not read. Once the outrigger did rake a dry reef, but before Jordan recovered from that sickening moment, she was in deep water again.

The blackboy laughed, and pointed toward the searchlights of patrols which covered the distant channel. Then he explained why a *prahu* had been ready and waiting: as soon as he had learned of Jordan's arrest, he had planned an outside jail break, which his own arrest had interrupted.

That was enough for Jordan. He knew better than to try to get the blackboy to explain how one could convincingly feign death, and how one could stage such a quick recovery. Probably the abo did not himself understand the trick, any more than a chameleon could explain its gift of changeable camouflage.

There was water and food; there were two captured rifles; and darkness protected the black, swift running *prahu*. So, whatever was ahead, it was bound to be better than jail in Koepang.

VIII

NOW that Jordan was running in the darkness of the Savu Sea, he had time to consider the certainty of air patrols from Koepang; by dawn, the owner of the *prahu* would be forced to account for his missing boat. Then, assuming that he did reach Portuguese territory, he would be in a ticklish position, with only a few guilders, and no papers.

The best chance of carrying on would be to convince the Japanese airline offi-

cials in Dilhi that he was Harry Hewitt. He wondered how far he would get with his pretense of amnesia.

The sun rose on a fishing settlement sprawled along the beach, at the foot of a steep mountain range. About a mile offshore was a reef, which extending east and west, was pierced by a narrow channel opening into the anchorage. Without charts, without any knowledge of the Timor coast, Jordan had to guess or ask his way.

He hailed a fisherman, and learned that that was no place to land: Atapupu village, though inhabited almost exclusively by Chinese, was the post of a Dutch official. But this information gave Jordan his bearings, so he continued coasting northeast toward Gedeh, a Portuguese settlement only four miles away.

BEFORE any planes from Koepang circled overhead, the swiftly running *prahu* was making for the ancient fort, where native boats were moored. The town itself was strung along a valley hemmed in by rocky peaks which reached 5,000 feet above the sea.

Unless times had changed, even the governor of the entire colony took his salary in coffee, instead of cash, with everything else geared accordingly. And before Jordan could dig into the supplies which Jumbuck Charley had stowed in the *prahu,* he saw that, regardless of the state of affairs, he would have to risk being conspicuous.

A Dutch plane was circling over the bay, and another was coming from the southwest. Though he had been considering the chances of carrying on to Dilhi by water, he was glad that he had not been caught in the open Savu Sea. While he had no proof that these planes were actually looking for him, it would be foolish to face a needless risk. For, granted that he could win a hide and seek game with aerial observers, they could waylay him as he approached Dilhi roads.

"Charley," he said, "too many iron birds making walkabout."

The blackboy agreed that the chances would be much better if they set out on foot across the interior.

If a sea-drenched white man and a blackboy in grimy shorts had come ashore with rifles in business-like Koepang, they would immediately have got their choice of surrendering or shooting it out, but this was Gedeh, one of the sleepiest spots in the furthest outpost of a colony that has slept for centuries. Chinese and Malays and natives stared, pointed, chattered—and probably forgot to notify what Portuguese officials the settlement had.

Jordan and his companion headed inland. Between them they had eight cartridges, a pack of matches, some rice and fish and a few bananas, and a jug of water.

There was no jungle once they climbed out of the narrow valley. The hills were dotted with sandalwood; dense thickets of thorny brush clothed some of the slopes, and the high tableland of the interior. All in all, Timor was a piece of Australia, utterly different from the rest of the Indies.

They avoided the Papuan villages and farmsteads. From time to time, they saw stocky Timorese ponies grazing; elsewhere, herds of sheep. The blackboy's little eyes gleamed as he sized up the supply of mutton. It was just like home—plenty of *jumbuck* to steal.

The more Jordan saw of interior Timor, that day, the more he was convinced that the Nippies would not stop with commercial aviation. While the plateau was cut by parallel ravines, the intervening flat spaces would make good landing fields, and with very little work. There was no jungle to clear, and instead of lava beds and volcanic irregularities, engineers had only to contend with slate and eroded sandstone.

The first brisk ascent blistered Jordan's feet, since his shoes were more suitable for town than for humping the bluey. Jumbuck Charley took off his brogans and swung

them from his neck. He had first offered his treasures to Jordan, a comradely touch that was quite wasted, as the abo's feet were the size of suitcases.

The thought of vengeful van Houten, however, was a powerful restorative. Jordan tore strips from his shirttail and padded the worst blisters; and singing helped, setting a cadence to keep those feet from dragging.

Once a jolly swagman camped by a billibong
Under the shade of a coolibah tree
And he sang as he watched and waited till his billy boiled
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me. . . .

But there was neither a billibong nor spring in sight, and what shade the coolibah trees cast was not enough to notice. Sometimes Jumbuck Charley paused, sniffed the air, scenting out water. This trick worked well enough in the heart of Australia, but Jordan feared that the nearness of the sea would kill the local signs.

Down came a jumbuck to drink at that billibong
Up jumped the swagman and grabbed him with glee;
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tuckerbag
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me. . . .

The rhythm did help. Some said that it had originated among the abos, that it was a corroboree chant as old as time itself, while others called the idea pure nonsense. But there was one verse which inspired Jordan in the closing hours of an endless day of ploughing through thorns, and stumbling over sun-baked ledges of slate.

Down came the troopers, one, two, three;
Who's that jolly jumbuck you've got in your tuckerbag?
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.
Up jumped the swagman, sprang into the billibong,
You'll never catch me alive said he. . . .

He was no longer sure whether he was a swagman pursued by the mounted police, or Harry Hewitt hunted by the governor of Koepang. He knew only that he was falling, picking himself up, being picked up by a monstrous black hand. Jumbuck Charley now carried both rifles.

NEAR dusk, the abo made clucking sounds, abruptly changed his course, and lengthened his stride. Jordan slid after him, down a steep ravine. Within half an hour they had halted at a pool scarcely big enough for a bird bath, and there made camp.

In an airline Dilhi was about fifty miles in a northeasterly direction from Atapupu; thus, allowing for time lost in detours about the heads of ravines, and around dense thickets, Jordan could reasonably assume that he was at least halfway to his destination. He had covered in a day five times as much ground as he could have in the jungle.

Miles behind him, Myrmidon's sharp cone rose well over 9,000 feet, the most conspicuous mountain of inner Timor. To his right was what must be Cliff Peak, so called from its precipitous seaward face, perhaps twenty miles east of Dilhi. While Jordan realized that his study of the charts, back in Darwin, could give him nothing more than a reasonable basis for guessing, he could depend on the blackboy's sense of direction to get them to the sea.

During the following day's march, the southeast monsoon made itself felt. Jordan, plodding through mists, knew that from the sea, all the high landmarks were cloud veiled. Planes, once they made instrument landings, would be secure from observation.

By mid-afternoon Jumbuck Charley called a halt. He smelled motor fumes, and he insisted that there was also the scent of people who were not Papuan. Judging from the rise of the ground, they were approaching the range of hills which, paralleling the coast, were perhaps five miles behind Dilhi. This was too far in-

land for the signs that the abo noticed.

It was not until evening that Jordan resumed the march. Finally, dragging himself toward the saddle between two knobs of sandstone, he caught a faint whiff of gasoline. Later, creeping down the slope, he smelled dried fish, and fancied that hot metal and the tang of rubber tainted the breeze.

As the ground flattened out, dim lights were just visible in the mist; apparently they were shielded from overhead observation. Somewhere, a well-muffled engine was barely audible. Then Jordan heard Japanese voices. He could no longer doubt that this was the confirmation of his suspicions, and the justification of his attempt.

Presently the hunch was clinched. Jumbuck Charley paused, sniffed the air, and pointed to the strand of bluish glow which, shoulder high, stretched horizontally as far as they could see. "Watch it," Jordan warned. "Don't touch it, don't even get near it, it'll kill you."

The upper wire of the fence carried a high tension current whose leakage into the misty air made a visible corona discharge; that, and the pungent smell of ozone told the story. Such a barrier indicated the importance of the enclosed space, and so, despite his weariness and his aches, Jordan resolved to gather a few details before making the descent to the coast.

Well away from the charged fence, they skirted the field. The smell of lubricating oil became plainer. Subdued lights outlined a long, low building which he concluded must be the quarters of the ground crew, judging from the metallic plink-plank-plonk of a three-stringed *samisen.* Later, there was the whirr and click-click of an anemometer.

A plane was approaching. As the sound of its powerful engines increased in volume, wing lights became visible. Jordan and the blackboy flattened, some yards from the fence. She circled, leveled off a moment after landing flares blazed from the field. Secure in the outer shadows, he watched a four-engined bomber taxi down a runway, and in the hangars whose darkness was now dispelled by ground lights he could see other bombers, as well as pursuit planes.

The flares had scarcely been extinguished when a car came grinding over the crest of the seaward ridge. It pulled up to the gate, blinked its headlights as in heliograph code. Jordan, as a matter of routine, made note of this detail. The corona of the charged wires disappeared; the gate opened to admit the vehicle. A moment later the high tension current was on again.

Someone had come from Dilhi to meet the Japanese plane. The timing was too close for coincidence.

THE spectacular thing for Jordan to do would have been to use a gun barrel to short out the high tension, blow the fuses, and then clear the fence before the blown fuses could be replaced. There was even a very good chance that the trick would not be detected, particularly if Jumbuck Charley, standing by, picked up the rifle when it fell from its momentary contact and dashed for cover. But Jordan now had too much information to justify the risk; his duty was to report, as quickly as he could, that he had positively confirmed the existence of a secret air base behind Dilhi.

Once that information reached Darwin, there would be time enough to snoop in detail. And as he moved seaward, he pictured himself touching off the large stores of aviation fuel whose fumes, exhaled

from breather pipes in the tanks, had carried so far inland.

IX

IT WAS close to dawn when Jordan and the blackboy descended to the mangrove swamps of the low-lying shore west of Dilhi. After concealing their rifles, they headed for the harbor, which was formed by coral reefs reaching half a mile out from the points of the bay, with a central reef, low and sandy, dividing the passage into two deep channels.

Little more than bulk and color distinguished Jumbuck Charley from Jordan, whose shirt was a few grimy shreds, and whose pants, thanks to the upland thorns, now ended at the knee.

Dilhi was not much to see: a sprawl of shacks and huts, a lighthouse, horizontally striped in blue and white, not far from the old fort. Somewhat inland, and commanding the small European section, was the governor's house; and Fort Rosario dominated the eastern point of the bay. The weather-beaten masonry, and the antiquity of the architecture showed how that once vast Malayan empire had gone to ruin when Portugal's sea power faded.

A Dutch steamer lay in the inner harbor: the *de Reuter,* plying between Darwin and Java. Jordan pondered his chances of approaching the skipper, and inducing him to send a message to Batavia, giving the details about the Jap air base. That done, he could risk further investigation, and, as likely as not, pick up Marcelle's trail.

That the mysterious blonde had made good her escape from Koepang was almost certain, even from Jumbuck Charley's waterfront gossip, accumulated the day before his arrest. She had left the hotel with a man whose desciption and name, da Silva, made Dilhi the logical destination.

The few guilders in his pocket gave him the choice of two moves, he could go to a Chinese tailor, buy himself a new outfit, and take a chance of getting word of Marcelle, or else he could lie low, waiting for deck passage on a steamer bound for Darwin. Lacking papers and funds, he was thoroughly blocked. Jordan realized as never before that getting information was the easiest part of espionage, and that transmitting it was the real feat.

He was alarmed by that hidden concentration of military planes. The deadly inference he had to draw was that Nippon was ready to blow off the lid, that the Australians, far from being alarmists, had been conservative in their anticipation of invasion by the monkey men.

Bad news, getting to Darwin and thence to Washington in time, would in a way be good news, for Nippon's announcement would be an informal flight of bombers. The heaviest crate could reach Darwin in less than three hours.

Tracking a rumor from island to island of the Indies, impersonating a dead man, no longer seemed important. Since radio from Dilhi's station was out of the question, he had to gamble on the skipper.

But before risking a Dutchman whose radio might even now be smoking with an alarm from Koepang, asking all ships to watch out for a *prahu* carrying a white fugitive, Jordan more than ever needed a getaway man. He had a stump of indelible pencil, and lacking paper he tore a handkerchief-sized piece from his shirt, fairly finishing the garment.

"CONCENTRATION JAP BOMBERS AND PURSUIT PLANES SECRET LANDING FIELD BEHIND DILHI NOTIFY CONSUL BRADY DARWIN OR RESIDENT VAN HOUTEN KOEPANG URGENT SIGNED JORDAN USN."

The *de Reuter,* still discharging cargo, would not steam out of the harbor until the following morning. Jordan said to the blackboy, "If I get into any trouble, give this to the skipper. Don't try to help me, no matter what happens. If you get into a jam, get rid of this, and don't talk. Unless the Dutch get you, and then tell them about the planes back there."

Jumbuck Charley recited his orders and the gist of the written message. No matter

into whose hands he fell, no one would ever accuse him of having read, much less written the text. Jordan went on, "Get back to Darwin any way you can, stow away, work your way, but get back. Now keep out of town until I make a walk-about. Remember, you don't know me, you never heard of me, and if they do nail you with that message, say you picked it up and don't know what it is."

The blackboy was about the only human creature on earth who could hope to get away with an account of having "found" a spy's report and having out of magpie curiosity picked it up. Thus Jordan had no qualms when, leaving Jumbuck Charley in the mangrove tangle, he emerged from cover and set out to get a closer look at Dilhi.

Europeans were scarce; none were in the narrow streets at this hour, though Papuan fishermen were putting out, and Malays carried vegetables and squawking fowl to market. Presently Jordan saw a Chinese haberdasher removing the shutters from his windows. He had to have clothes, for while a Dutch skipper would listen to a half-naked savage, he would not deal with a ragged white man.

The wrinkled little Chinese beamed through his unglazed silver spectacle frames, clasped and shook his own hands. If he was surprised at the appearance of his customer, he gave no sign. Unfortunately, the fellow did not speak pidgin English, and his Portuguese equivalent proved a terror. So the contest opened with gestures.

The stock of course was Japanese made, the kind of stuff which had driven European goods from the market, but for once Jordan was grateful for the strangling monopoly of the monkey men. Even at the old man's price, the clothes were dirt cheap, but Jordan, who knew the correct figures, set a basis of bargaining.

He grimaced, spat, and used the most unprintable of the many unprintable words the Chinese have for designating Japs. He implied that he'd rather go naked than wear the trash. The old man protested, doubtless that nothing else was available, yet he softened up.

Shoes closed at a bit over a guilder, and a shirt for one and a half. A tie cost six Dutch cents, handkerchiefs the same; shorts and singlet, half a guilder. The only setback was a suit, which the tailor next door would have to make. That was bad, almost as bad as having to offer Dutch money in a Portuguese province.

The haberdasher pointed to the Dutch ship and jabbered, then pointed to Jordan, who nodded and said, "Sure. I'm a sailor. Keopang." Unfortunately, his sole knowledge of Chinese consisted, naturally enough, of words not useful in mercantile transactions, but he hoped that the old man's suspicions, if any, would be confined to the Chinese colony.

They finally arrived at a compromise about the suit. The haberdasher went to the tailor, and returned, after an hour of bargaining, with white drill coat and pants. The fit was not bad, and for second-hand goods, the condition was decent enough.

Once outfitted, he found a *satai* stand, near the customs house, where a sleek Malay had set up a charcoal burner, all ready to grill morsels of chicken for the morning trade.

"When does the ship sail?" Jordan asked, indicating the *de Reuter*.

"Doubtless Allah and the captain know, *tuan*." He fanned the fire, dipped a skewered morsel into a bowl of fat, and set it over the glowing coals. "Did you have a pleasant voyage, sir?"

"All voyages are pleasant after you reach land."

Jordan's mouth watered from the savor of grilling meat and chopped onions, and curry sauce. He did not until this moment realize how hungry he was; jail food, and three days of cold rice and dried fish had left him famished. He suddenly became light headed, somewhat from fatigue, somewhat alarmed at having blurted out,

needlessly, that the *de Reuter* was not the ship which had brought him to Dilhi.

The *satai* vendor was only politely interested, and pleased at being addressed in passable Malay. But for all that, Jordan had to pull himself together. He scorched his lips at the fuming bit of meat, and hastily took a slice of cucumber. Collecting gossip was part of his job, but he was in no shape to work.

Then he saw a gig pulling out from the *de Reuter,* and making for the customs dock. The *satai* vendor said, "*Tuan,* that is the skipper."

Jordan gulped a final morsel, paid when the vendor had counted the skewers, and headed for the dock. The master of the *de Reuter* was stocky, with a heavy, suntanned face and a head the shape of a cannon ball; a grim, stolid looking fellow, whose blue eyes had no more approval for the Malays at the oars than he had for the town, or the Portuguese flag that was being hoisted, somewhat belatedly.

SELLING this man a bill of goods would be a task. His jaw was set, his chin was thrust forward, aggressively, as he barged toward the door. He kicked it, backed off, spat; he advanced to hammer with a massive fist, and rattled all the hardware. Stepping back again the skipper folded his arms, cocked his head, and began to curse.

Jordan recognized four languages, and knew that there were as many more which he could not name. The cadence was deliberate, there was something inspiring and impressive about the restrained ferocity and bottomless contempt he put into each syllable; he was little short of pontifical in his denunciation of the officials, the town, the province, its governor, and the entire Portuguese nation.

Jordan took heart. This man would believe anything of Dilhi, provided only that it was evil enough. He stepped forward, nodded, and said, "Good morning, *Mynheer.* While you are waiting—"

"What in God's damnation and ten million perverted fiends do you want?" The skipper pivoted with speed amazing in such a square rigged and stolid man. "I'm busy! Shut up."

"I want passage to Koepang or Surabaya or hell—and while you're waiting, you can listen to me."

The skipper snorted. "What's an Australian doing here? Beachcomber, huh? Want to work your way, what?"

All the while he appraised Jordan from head to foot. Without waiting for an answer, he went on, now almost amiably. "This place always gets on my nerves." He winked. "Better see the *serang,* pay him a few guilders. Devil of a note, white man in this hole."

Inside, someone who was drowsy and annoyed and trying to be patient, protested in Portuguese. The skipper bawled a smoking retort in the same language, and added, for Jordan's benefit, "Why the devil doesn't he sleep in his clothes then?"

"If you don't mind, I'll go aboard now. When do you sail, Captain?"

"As soon as these blasted monkeys realize that I'm in a hurry!"

Then a hinge creaked, and the skipper stormed through the doorway.

Jordan felt better already. He strolled down the waterfront, looking for a boatman to take him out to the *de Reuter.* But plans, he learned the following moment, were as subject to alteration in the Portuguese capital as in Koepang.

Two men, stepping briskly from the doorway of a warehouse, blocked his advance. They were white clad, slant-eyed, and ceremonious. The one with the rimless glasses said, "So nice to see you, Mr. Hewitt." The other chimed in, "Welcome from successful jailbreak in Koepang."

"I don't know what you're talking about. Gangway!"

The two Japs drew Browning automatics. "Caution always laudable," they hissed politely. "You do not know us, we

know you. I am Tashi Yamamoto. My colleague, Enyo Aramata. Now join us, unconspicuously. Departure on S.S. *de Reuter* very indiscreet."

X

NOW that he had information which should reach Darwin without delay, Jordan saw little beauty in being so readily accepted as the late Harry Hewitt. Mr. Yamamoto, the one with the glasses, might be a poor marksman, and so might Aramata, but at arm's length, skill was at a discount.

More than that, these blank little monkey men were very much at home in Dilhi; they held all the aces in the deck, and had others up their sleeves.

"Please relax," Yamamoto said. "Our firearms were only to prevent impulsive resistance of weary fugitive not recognizing friends. Daring escape from Koepang made needless our rescue plan. Sound of firing near jail told us of someone escaping durance vile, also thwarted us. So did high-powered police launch putting out to patrol harbor. Very nearly overtaking us."

Jordan began to understand the distraction which had materially helped him and Jumbuck Charley get away in a *prahu*. "So you wanted me to leave Koepang—hmm—blasted decent of you."

Aramata giggled. "Ha! We apprehended return of vanished memory, hence daring rescue attempt. What progress is making amnesia?"

"Mmmm—terribly sorry, but there are lots of blanks."

Yamamoto and Aramata both giggled. As they left the waterfront to walk toward the center of town, they pocketed their pistols.

Presently, instead of continuing toward the governor's house, they swung toward a solid masonry pile half a block beyond it.

A Jap porter opened the gate, bowed double, hissed, and greeted the two officers. Then the iron grille closed behind Jordan, and a lock clicked.

Once in the dusky, teak-paneled *salon* of the ancient house, Yamamoto and Aramata settled down to the business of reviving Jordan's memory. The former began, "Murderous attack in Darwin by what kind of persons?"

"I don't remember a thing. Except for what my papers said, I didn't even know who I was. They told me I was from Cairns. Then there was Marcell Walraevens who recognized me. She said I was from Batavia. That I was a friend of the family. The Resident in Koepang believed I was Erich Berger."

"So you want passage on the *de Reuter*—"

"To go to Batavia. Where someone can identify me."

"Very indiscreet. You do not believe van Houten?"

Jordan knew that to have approached the skipper of a Dutch ship had been bad, but there was a chance of talking his friends out of their suspicion. "I don't know what to believe."

"No remembering of observations in Darwin?"

He shook his head. "Not till after I got to the hospital."

Yamamoto said, "You are really Erich Berger, agent of our esteemed Teutonic ally. Do not have apprehensions. You left Darwin not being suspected, hence valuable. Except in Dutch territory. Recent complications expose everything. What van Houten did in Koepang is what to expect in all Dutch possessions, so we have new work for you."

"I can't remember—"

"No impedimenta," Aramata assured him. "New instructions, new papers."

They took a picture of Jordan for the forged passports they proposed to furnish. He began to enjoy the situation, and the prospect of being sent back to Australia as an Axis agent. This, he told

himself, was the richest bit of luck imaginable.

When the shutter clicking was over, Yamamoto resumed, "You went as pearling dummy on the *Tatsu*. Recollections?"

"What kind of dummy?"

They explained that job. And then, business finally disposed of, tea was served. At the conclusion of the ceremony, which Jordan carefully bungled from the start, Aramata showed him to a room on the second floor.

"To make yourself at home." He spoke politely. "Walking in garden not recommended. But the house, go where you like. Rest after flight from Koepang. Meanwhile, we get proper suitings for you."

WHEN Aramata left, Jordan wondered at the lack of any reference to the airline. Perhaps this omission had been a trap to trick him into betraying a residue of memory; or, not yet entirely certain of his future usefulness, they were taking no chances.

Presently, there was a tapping at the door. He expected a tailor, instead, Marcelle Walraevens was at the threshold. "Harry," she cried, and flung both arms about him, "I've been so worried! And all the more so when I heard that you'd made a break before they could manage to help you."

"Cruising in a *prahu* wasn't fun. How'd you get here?"

She told him of da Silva's last minute warning, and the trip in the speedboat. Then, "Has anything come back to you?"

"They're sending me on a new assignment. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I'm as badly wanted by the Dutch as you are, I'm afraid. I never imagined, when we left Darwin, that I'd be a fugitive."

He detailed the meetings with van Houten. "And that's something you can explain—Friedrich Schwarz, who went by the name of de Blauw, in Batavia. He was messed up some way with your Uncle Pieter—can't you give me a hint? It might come back to me."

"Of course not. I knew you as Harry Hewitt." She sighed, wearily. "Oh, we're going in circles! Don't you trust me?"

He made a gesture to indicate the house and its residents. "Do they? My dear, I didn't mean it *that* way, but after all, they can tell you. And if they won't, then I shouldn't—not even if I could."

At noon, a dingy tramp steamed into the inner harbor; her general appearance, as nearly as Jordan could tell from the barred window, justified her Portuguese flag. And around four in the morning, Yamamoto and Aramata awakened him; he was leaving at once, and they would help him pack.

"Instructions?"

"En route, please. Passports, funds, other impedimenta, ditto."

"May I see Miss Walraevens?"

Yamamoto showed all his teeth. "Presently. Aboard ship. Same destination, same mission."

A few minutes later, a Jap porter, carrying Marcelle's luggage, followed her down the hall. Aramata and Yamamoto wedged themselves into the car which carried the outgoing agents to the customs dock.

Once more, Jordan asked for his papers.

"Japanese steward aboard the *Funchal*," Yamamoto answered.

Jordan's luggage had barely been put into the cockroach-infested stateroom, which was just across the passageway from Marcelle's, than the *Funchal* got under way. And it was not until sunrise that he

began to wonder at his destination. Not even a landlubber would head north from Dilhi to head for Australia.

A Japanese steward brought breakfast to Jordan's cabin. On the tray was a heavy envelope. The man said, "Passports and instructions, as per order."

"Who are you?"

"Name are Sugi."

"Where is this bloody tub taking us?"

Sugi bowed, came up grinning. "Sandakan, British North Borneo, including way stations. Please memorize instruction and destroy same before landing."

The envelope contained cash, a passport made out for Harry Hewitt, and a sheet on which had been typed an address in Sandakan. If this last constituted instructions, then his orders certainly were terse. While it made sense enough, getting him and Marcelle out of Dutch territory, there was something definitely odd about being led to believe that the destination was Australia.

Sandakan was roughly a thousand miles from Dilhi. The *Funchal* would make a three, perhaps four day trip of it, judging from the way she wallowed and wheezed her way northward into the Banda Sea. Still and all, that was better than being marooned in Dilhi, unable to get word to Darwin; for, he could cable from Sandakan to expose the secret airbase.

Some minutes later he heard the steward knocking at Marcelle's door. Doubtless she was getting breakfast and her orders. The more he pondered on the way he had been led to believe that he was bound for Australia, the more he wondered if Marcelle also had been deceived as to the destination of the *Funchal*.

He spent the day on deck with his lovely enemy. They were the only passengers aboard the tramp; and dinner at the captain's table was no more treat than the master himself, who was as greasy as his vessel.

After dinner, Jordan proposed, "Let's go to my stateroom and throw things at the roaches. I dug up a bottle of Cape of Good Hope brandy."

"Cape of Good Hope? Oh, lovely! Uncle Pieter's favorite."

There was a fresh sparkle in her eyes, and a possessive touch in her hand as she caught his arm and went down the passage with him. Looking back, Jordan saw the skipper's knowing look.

The brandy was smooth stuff. Jordan recklessly tossed off three quick ones, just to set the pace; but he was neither as carefree nor as dizzy as his speech and gestures indicated. "Speaking of Sandakan," he said, and deftly boosted Marcelle to his knee, "that's near Balabac, off the Borneo coast."

"Oh—is this ju-jitsu or a geography lesson?" She laughed, hitched her skirt back over her knees, and fluffed her rumpled hair.

"Neither. I was leading up to a drink they make in Hotel de France, in Manila. Balabac Punch. Got secret ingredients. You drink three, and you'll tell your right name."

"Marvellous. How do you mix them?"

He cocked his head, nodded in what seemed to be half-drunken solemnity. "Don't know if I stole the right secret." He waved, knocked over a glass, and then boosted Marcelle to her feet as he lunged to retrieve it. Then, digging into a basket which was near his luggage, he brought out limes and charged water and another bottle of liquor. "But it's all in the interests of science, you know."

He gravely set to work mixing. He did not know whether the result remotely resembled Balabac Punch, and he did not care. His air of being on the verge of regaining his memory made Marcelle careless of trifles, such as the sleight of hand whereby her glass got a treble shot of smooth brandy, neatly disguised with flavoring ingredients.

He did not tell her his right name, nor did she tell him hers: simply because, before she knew it, she was higher than a

stratosphere liner. When she sensed the state of affairs, it was too late to do anything about it. She took two steps toward the door and swerved against the bulkhead.

"Harry—I'm terribly—dizzy—help me —to my—stateroom—"

He scooped her up in his arms, and still managed to keep his mind on business. He managed to twist the knob. A glance up and down the passage; no one in sight. Jordan, steadier than he had any business to be, crossed over with three long strides, not to Marcelle's door, but to a vacant stateroom, which he knew from previous trial was unlocked.

He stretched the sleeping beauty on the bunk, shivered as he drew the spread over her.

This catch-call was even worse than the quarters that had been assigned to them. Probably the steward had done his best to clean up for the two passengers.

"It'd be much nicer listening to your sweet murmurings," he said, "but business is business, my dear."

She still had a firm hold on her handbag, but she was not aroused when he dipped in and got her key. Then, seeing that the passageway was still clear, he lost no time in getting into Marcelle's quarters.

XI

MARCELLE'S luggage, like his own, had originated in Dilhi; he could tell that from its workmanship. She'd be out for quite awhile. He had plenty of time, and he needed awhile to steady himself, and shake down the sizeable cargo he had taken on. Frisking luggage so that the owner would not suspect took a nice touch.

He had to be particularly careful on this job. When she finished sleeping off that so-called Balabac Punch, Marcelle would be peevish and suspicious. He sat down and said to himself, "When I bring her back, I'd better pass out halfway to the door and stay blotto till she comes out of it."

No, that might be a little too obvious.

He had locked the door behind him. Thus, when he heard the furtive tapping, there was time enough to brush the butterflies from his brain, and devote a few seconds to intensive thinking, as well as looking.

The knock was repeated. Jordan swung himself to the upper bunk. Too bad about the light, but the snap of the switch would be a giveaway. Someone was on the prowl, with only two passengers aboard, a shipboard flirtation was out of the question.

A key turned. The door opened, shut, and was locked again. That the light had been left on would be accepted as common carelessness.

It was Sugi, the steward. Being five feet three, he would have had to use a ladder to see that Jordan was on the upper bunk, and jammed back against the bulkhead. Jordan, not daring to move, had to depend on his ears when Sugi passed from the field of vision, and toward the luggage.

He was not bothering to be deft; the muffled rustlings and thumps told that. It was far from coincidence that Sugi had picked this time for a search. Without doubt the steward had tapped at Jordan's door, and getting only prolonged silence for an answer, had drawn certain plausible conclusions. Two lonely passengers, several bottles, and a long way to Sandakan—well, they'd be damned idiots if they answered, assuming that they could answer!

There was a ripping sound. Sugi was digging into the lining of the suitcase. In the morning, when Marcelle raised the roof, everyone would be mystified and so sorry, please. The little stinker would be bland and smiling even if Jordan jumped down and confronted him; for brazen insolence, the monkey men had an edge even on the Nazis.

Then came a gasp; not the hiss of politeness, but the catch of breath that fol-

lows a discovery enough to shake even a poker-faced Oriental, who, just by the way, isn't so imperturbable when he thinks no one is looking.

Paper crackled. Jordan, who had been inching himself from the bulkhead, bit by bit, during the search, saw that Sugi, planting himself in a chair, was smoothing out and studying a sheet which seemed to have been folded a number of times and then rolled into a pencil-sized tube.

It was beyond doubt intensely interesting. Sugi was pronouncing the words aloud, though he muttered them unintelligibly. Then, finished, he folded and thrust the sheet into his pocket.

Jordan had planned, of course, to wait for Sugi to leave; he had expected the steward to make at least a show of repacking the suitcases. But since Sugi thought the paper was too valuable to replace, something had to be done about it, and at once.

Jordan reached for the ceiling bulb, closed his eyes for a few seconds, and twisted. The Jap exclaimed. Momentarily, he was blinded by the sudden blackness, whereas Jordan's eyes had had time to accommodate themselves. In fact, enough light came through the porthole glass to make Sugi's white uniform quite plain as Jordan bounded to the deck.

He uncorked a punch which should have settled the show; he wanted the Jap cold-caulked without ever knowing what had hit him, but the pitching of the *Funchal* spoiled that. Though he knocked Sugi against the bulkhead, the blow glanced, and the Jap, whether he could see or not, had a ready answer.

Jordan thought that his arm was being torn from its socket and, at the same time, thrust back into his body. He did a nose dive, and the deck came up to meet him. But the chair which had skated during the roll, and tumbled over in the encounter, upset Sugi's advantage. The Jap tripped, and Jordan kicked him in the stomach before he could think of a hold.

That was too much for an Asiatic superman. Sugi doubled up, turned as blue as his yellow hide permitted, and went glassy-eyed. Jordan wondered, "Shall I finish the guy, or give him artificial respiration?"

Then he fished the paper from Sugi's pocket. The closely pencilled English was just about as much of a shock to Jordan as his boot had been to the Jap. He exhaled a sigh, eyed the twitching steward, and grimaced. Sugi had read. Sugi would remember.

He was recovering from that terrific booting. That was bad. Jordan would have to try again, and make a job of it. Dirty work, and he did not like it; but neither did he like what was going on in China, nor were Axis U-boats to his taste, and then there was that treacherous concentration of bombers in Dilhi. Even so, he hesitated, and for two reasons.

First, he had to be sure that the job was absolutely necessary; and second, he had to do it in a way that would not jeopardize his next move.

HE TORE up a sheet, and carefully hog-tied Sugi. Then he went to the adjoining stateroom and set to work sobering Marcelle. Slapping her with wet towels finally got results. She sat up, blinking, bewildered, and indignant.

"Fun's over, darling." He displayed a short barreled, small caliber automatic. "Neat little gun, but it didn't stay put."

That helped sober her. She exclaimed, reached for her knee, and found only the empty holster. "And you're careless in other ways," he went on. "Hiding this composition exercise in the grip of your suitcase."

Jordan pocketed the automatic, and produced the paper which had fascinated Sugi. Marcelle was now sober, shocked and dismayingly pale. She did not know what to do or say.

"Operations plan for bombing Port Darwin. You didn't waste much time in Dilhi. Nice intelligence work, but ama-

teurish. Should have memorized the high spots. And what you wrote about me wasn't nice. If this ever got to British Territory, Sandakan, for instance, I'd be in worse shape than I was in Koepang."

The way she faced punishment, once the initial shock wore off, made Jordan respect the blonde whose mystery had been peeled to a thin film. She should have tried to beg off; she should have become hysterical, or have resorted to incoherent and contradictory explanations, but she sat there, face hardening in resolution. She was game, in spite of having no illusions as to what her fate would be on an Axis controlled tramp steamer somewhere in the Banda Sea.

"You Nazi swine," she said, very deliberately adding a word that was not part of her working vocabulary, "it is just your luck to have found that pistol. Why didn't you use it instead of bothering to awaken me?"

"Because I wanted to get the truth about a few things. You wrote a postscript about me, and your Uncle Pieter. Why?"

"I thought there'd be a chance in Sandakan. Not for me to get ashore, but for this to fall into the hands of some *white man!* Perhaps they'd get you before this rat trap sailed for Palawan."

"Palawan?"

"Oh, *you* wouldn't know!" she said, ironically. *"You'd* be surprised if anyone said that Uncle Pieter didn't commit suicide, that he was murdered simply because he was not on the Nazi payroll. But this operations plan, coming from me, would clear our name. Now do you see why I came to Darwin, pretending I'd never suspected you, back in Batavia? You fool—you conceited ass, you thought I was in love with you?"

Jordan was learning things faster than he could digest them, and they rang true. "So that's how it was?"

She laughed venomously. "Something your conceit can't stand! Whatever happens to me, it won't last long."

"So I was making love to you?"

"You've forgotten that? I wish that *I* could!"

"This has gone far enough. It still was amateurish to think that a first chop snooper wouldn't notice the leather grip of your suitcase wasn't stitched with sax-ends, like the binding. That the new stitching wasn't a cobbler's work. You've put us both on a spot, my dear."

His level voiced reply to her cold hatred puzzled Marcelle. "Both? I can't see how, but it's too good to be true."

"If you're steady enough on your feet, come into your stateroom. Let me show you who did the snooping. Of course I tricked you a bit with that Balabac Punch. After all, you were betting *I'd* be loose-lipped and tell *you* things. About Uncle Pieter, for instance. Only you lost, which gave me my chance to get a look at your orders."

"My orders?"

HE CHUCKLED. "Nazi orders, Jap orders. The mission I figured brought you to Australia."

"You *figured*—" She mouthed that last word; curiosity now shaped her face. "That's not British nor Australian English."

"Don't be amazed at that. Come on."

When she crossed the threshold of her stateroom, Marcelle gasped, pointed at the writhing form on the deck. "Sugi?"

"The steward. I ducked just in time, and he was too sure you and I were throwing a party in my room. So I saw what he wanted. Saw that he was surprised and puzzled. Damn it, so was I, after I kicked him silly."

"And now we are in a mess!"

Jordan grimaced. "We'll get out of it. Sugi's memory will fail."

Marcelle shivered a bit, and her glance shifted to Jordan's side pocket, where he had her pistol. He shook his head. "You stroll on deck a few minutes. If you see any of the crew, ask him a foolish question.

If there should be a splash, don't pay any attention. Do you understand?"

She nodded. "You trust me?"

"You spoke your mind when you were counting what you thought were your last minutes aboard the *Funchal,*" he answered. "And it was good."

XII

WHEN Marcelle returned to her stateroom, Jordan was there, and so were the bottles. "Party goes on," he said. "We've got to look as if we'd been places. Your guess is as good as mine when it comes to predicting what'll happen when Sugi is missed. Luckily, it's getting rougher, he could have gone over accidentally. It depends a good deal on how close the skipper is to the Japs. Did you hear anything?"

She shook her head. "But I saw, from the corner of my eye. Give me a drink."

"Get your suitcase fixed up first."

As Marcelle set to work, she asked, "Aren't you going to tell me more? I have to believe now, but I can't understand it. Those were the charts Uncle Pieter was suspected of having sold to Jan Deblauw."

"My pal Jan Deblauw." He touched a match to the operations order. "Only no one suspected me, excepting yourself."

"I didn't turn you in at Koepang."

"I rather thought you had, though what really promised to settle me was a picture of Erich Berger alias Harry Hewitt, sitting with Schwarz alias Jan Deblauw, in a car near the Netherlands Indies Bank in Batavia."

"You've changed. Your wits aren't as foggy as in Darwin or Koepang. Are you —are you really Harry Hewitt?"

"Where's your feminine intuition?"

"I hadn't seen Harry for months and months," she answered. "Then those weeks you spent in the hospital at Darwin —of course you'd not be yourself. Now I know you're not Harry, but—oh, it's crazy! You look like him, you sound like him, except—"

He chuckled. "Except that that deep cut on my neck changed Harry's voice a little. Oh, all right. Harry Hewitt died that night. I took his place, on your account, and also in the hope of catching up with the *Tatsu,* which I was sure was looking for more than pearls off the Australian coast. I was betting you'd tell me more about that case of marked charts, about any Nazis who'd survived that mopping up in Batavia. I thought you were one of the dirty pack. And amnesia, I figured, would make you wrack your brain for reminders of the good old days, to bring my memory back."

Her laugh now had a touch of hysteria. "What a trial I must have been! Not knowing anything, and expecting to pump you when your memory returned—give me a drink—oh, how crazy—great Black Dragons in Palawan!"

Jordan poured some brandy. He was surprised that it had no perceptible effect. He smashed some glassware, scattered squeezed limes about. Before the stage setting was completed, he accidentally cut his palm on a broken tumbler, and made the place look like an abbatoir.

And then the mixture from the several bottles did catch up. It was a first class, long needed, and relaxing jag.

AT BREAKFAST, the skipper chuckled when he saw the blear-eyed passengers. A mess boy took the steward's place. Whatever the officers and crew thought about the disappearance of Sugi, there was no comment. Apparently the skipper had concluded that Jordan and Marcelle had been entirely too busy with their own affairs to have noted any circumstances leading to a man's going overboard.

And when the *Funchal* pulled into Sandakan, Jordan still did not know how much, if any, investigation there had been.

Nor did Jordan cable any report to Darwin. Just the day previous, the Dutch and

the British had taken Portuguese Timor into "protective custody." There was no mention of a secret airbase behind Dilhi; the dispatch said only that the Japanese commercial route from Palao to Timor had been discontinued.

Whether Jumbuck Charley had boarded the *de Reuter* in Dilhi and given the hell-roaring Dutch skipper that message pencilled on a scrap of shirt, or whether the crackdown had come on general principles, Jordan could not guess, and did not bother trying.

After a brief call at the address which the late Mr. Sugi had included in Jordan's orders, the morning of his sailing from Dilhi, he boarded the *Funchal* again. She was unloading little cargo in Sandakan; and stowing less; nor was much needed in the way of supplies for the run to Puerto Princesa, on the westernmost reach of the Sulu Sea.

Marcelle had not yet sent her luggage ashore. Jordan said, "You don't mean you are still insisting on going to that hole in the most God-forsaken outskirts of the Philippines!"

"You are. Why shouldn't I?"

It was starting all over again, word for word, the same fiercely whispered debate that had kept them sleepless each night en route since Sugi had gone to the sharks. He retorted, "I have orders. They still accept me as Harry Hewitt. Somewhere in Palawan there's a headquarters like that nest of rats at Davao Bay, except that the one in Palawan is secret. I've been trying to tell you that you'll put me on the spot, tracking along!"

"Why did they send me out of Dilhi?" she challenged.

He could not answer that, except by countering, "They smuggled you out of Koepang so you wouldn't be pinched by the Dutch and questioned, they assumed that you must have learned things from me—"

"You mean, they learned from me, I convinced them that your memory was a blank, or you'd never have left Dilhi! So I'm going along, I'll wait for you in Puerto Princesa while you're in the hinterland."

"Just because your story of the airbase in Dilhi broke before you could put it out, you feel you've got to be dramatic, so you can get someone in Batavia to reopen the case against your uncle?"

"Well, yes. Prove myself, so someone would listen. I can't quit now, can I?"

"You can. You've got to."

"I can't! Haven't I told you, time and again, that after following you to Darwin, to Koepang, to Dilhi, it'd look odd if I fell out now? Good heaven, after an all night party that made the skipper roll his eyes and wink whenever he saw us on deck, wouldn't it be out of character if I stayed in Sandakan?"

"That's old stuff! What do you think'll happen, happen damn quick, now that Portuguese Timor is in 'protective custody'? War—just that much sooner. The Japs have lost face, having their airline from Palao to Dilhi blocked off. My God, woman, wasn't Koepang bristling with war talk? The United States is still in a dope, trying to pacify the yellow scum, the Australians aren't quite so simple but they're bad enough, the British are of the same piece. There's nobody but the Dutch who see things as they are, and you've lived in Batavia since Belgium blew up."

"All right, there'll be war."

"And Sandakan won't be a paradise, but it'll be a lot better than Palawan, or Mindanao, or Luzon. If the lid blows up before I get my orders from the Japs, I'll be stranded there for keeps. So will you."

"And you know damn well that if I don't leave there in a hurry, someone will wake up to the real facts about my amnesia. I'll get what I gave Sugi. I'll be asked about Sugi, even though they have no reason to suspect me. Now get off this ship while you can!"

Her shoulders sagged. "I'm afraid that you've convinced me. But I'll be on pins and needles till you return. Oh, you idiot, do I have to blurt it right out?"

"I wasn't playing, back there, either. But this is a war, the first move of one." He patted her knee, lightly touched the undersized pistol. "Wear that everywhere but in the shower, and watch your step."

"That Sugi business?"

He laughed, and hoped he was convincing. "No, just general principles. Now get going, and if I find any records that'll help Uncle Pieter, I'll cage them."

So she went ashore, and that night, the *Funchal* stood out to sea. There was a new steward, just as bland and smiling as Sugi; the only difference was that he said his name was Saburo. Probably he had received orders in the Japanese camera shop where Jordan had got the address of the contact man in Puerto Princesa.

JORDAN had never been on the island of Palawan, which was some twenty-five miles wide, and ten times as long, reaching from Balabac to the leper island of Culion: a banana shaped barrier which separated the Sulu Sea from the South China Sea, and to this day, the refuge of small-scale pirates and pearl poachers. If there was any place in the Philippines more desolate, and with scantier population, Jordan had not heard of it. Palawan, entirely overlooked in the Americanization of the Islands, could well be an unexposed Davao; and this probability was what convinced Jordan that he should press on, instead of reporting that his impersonation of the late Harry Hewitt had served its purpose.

Thus far, he was not sure that he had accomplished anything; even if his report on Dilhi had resulted in the seizure of Portuguese Timor, Jumbuck Charley, a bird-brained abo, had carried the ball.

He was encouraged, the following noon, when he saw the green slopes of Palawan, and the tin roofs of Puerto Princesa's *godowns,* the sprawling shacks perched on stilts, the beached *prahus.* He went ashore in a lighter; but not until he had learned what was beneath the *Funchal's* forward hatch—gasoline drums.

Whether they were empties picked up in Dilhi, or full ones smuggled from the Dutch fields in Sumatra, he could not guess.

There was no way of telling what circuitous cruises the *Funchal* had made before putting in at Dilhi. But in either case, he anticipated action: somewhere in Palawan, there was something which furnished gas, or else required it.

A *caramata* drawn by a shaggy, undersized pony took him from the pier to a Japanese grocery store. He was not surprised to see that Saburo, the steward picked up in Sandakan, had already arrived.

"This way, please, Mr. Hewitt," the proprietor said, and pointed to a doorway which led to the rear. "We have been expecting you. Ha! Like home, being back again, is not?"

Jordan assured him that it was grand. But he would have given a good deal to know when he was supposed to have been in Puerto Princesa the last time. Face to face, the adventure promised a lot, and none of it any too good, particularly if amnesia wore down too thin.

XIII

AFTER an unpretentious meal and a few cups of warm *saki,* Mr. Takahama led the way from his grocery store down an odorous alley which finally snaked to the waterfront, where he patiently waited for Jordan and Saburo to

decide which would be the first to board the waiting launch.

Emerging from the harbor, the little merchant skirted the coast for some miles, and then nosed the launch into an inlet which reached far into the coastal mountains. Beyond this rocky spine was a broad stretch of swampy lowlands which sloped gently toward the South China Sea. In shape, terrain, and scarcity of population, Palawan reminded Jordan of Sumatra; neither sound nor smell nor glow of cooking fires revealed any native village along the route.

The cleft in the mountains narrowed until the towering cliffs blocked out all but a sliver of sky; then, widening, the channel opened into the rolling country which sloped toward the distant China Sea. And here, guarded by isolation and camouflage, a supply dump and landing spread out before Jordan.

Armed sentries halted the party. Takahama said, "Walls of passage well mined, no chance of surprise."

They went down a substantial road which, after winding through dense jungle, entered the clearing whose hangars and buildings Jordan had perceived from the crest. The smell of distant mangrove swamps mingled with the exhalation of high test fuel. Even without having had a chance to appraise the extent of the hidden depot, he was certain that it was a menace to British North Borneo, and a threat to the Dutch oil fields along the Makassar Straits. With all eyes on Davao and its colony of 30,000 so-called hemp planters, the monkey men had slipped one over, putting their big arsenal in unexplored Palawan.

Jordan, entering the area, got a dismaying glimpse of a hideout which made the base in Dilhi seem trivial. "If I get out of here," he told himself, as he followed his escort into the headquarters building, "I'll be bringing the makings of a war."

After a report of this undercover invasion, the boys in Washington might realize that appeasement was a fool's game.

For some minutes, Jordan waited in a room whose desks and filing cabinets indicated that he was very close to the master of the show; but he did not suspect how near he had come to the heart of things until Takahama returned, flashed that mechanical smile, and said, "The Master of Dragons will see you at once, Mr. Hewitt."

Jordan did not answer. He could not. Meeting the chief of the murder society face to face, was progress beyond anything he had imagined. Marcelle's leading questions, it seemed, had not been based on a melodramatic imagination!

When the door closed behind him, he was cut off from realities like gasoline and bombs and planes; he was in the murky red glow of Japanese stage setting. The walls were black, solid black except for medallions which displayed the dragon of the order. Folding screens broke the barren expanse. He had no chance to wonder what these concealed, for he was now facing a slight figure whose shape was muffled by black mask and hood and gown.

Stage play; murder is neither more nor less decisive because of its decorations, yet he had to fight off the dismay and helplessness which crept up on him.

"You are Mr. Hewitt," the voice behind the mask stated. "Be seated, and tell me what progress the return of memory makes."

One good thing about it, one could not be expected to recognize a masked face. Jordan answered, "Much, too much is still blank."

A high-pitched, meaningless Oriental giggle preceded the reply: "Then let me help. You bungled in Java, and you were not useful on the pearling lugger. But what finally compelled me to order your associates to liquidate you in Port Darwin was Pieter van Moellen's niece. Erich Berger, we had lost confidence in you."

Jordan knew now that he had from the start built on quicksand; that he had im-

personated a spy who had been doomed by his own master. It was now clear that those stolen Dutch charts with their circled areas had been purposely left with a mortally wounded man in order to extract the last bit of usefulness from him, by letting him establish, for British consumption, the presence of non-existent danger spots.

Jordan laughed. There was nothing else for him to do. "I still do not remember, but I can easily believe. But why have you gone to so much trouble to call me to Palawan? This could have been settled elsewhere."

"They did not know in Dilhi that you were to have been liquidated in Darwin," the Master of Dragons explained, as though he had been discussing a mathematical theorem. "Moreover, I had hoped that you could explain certain puzzling things."

"Circumstances tonight," Jordan answered, with a calmness that was beyond his understanding, "do not encourage my recuperation from amnesia."

The black robe rustled, and a thin, pale hand rose in a peremptory gesture. "This is no longer humorous, Lieutenant Jordan. Hewitt-Berger died, and United States Naval Intelligence sent an impostor. Please correct me if the name is wrong—Gilbert Jordan, Lieutenant, Senior Grade."

IF THE situation had not been so hopeless, if it had not been such a perfect piece of diabolical irony, Jordan would have broken out in a cold sweat, or he might have run amuck, gambling on the chance of throttling the Master of Dragons before concealed watchers cut him down.

For he had begun to sense the stares from behind the screens; he could feel the eyes and the thoughts which centered on him. Now that they knew he was an officer, he had to play it out calmly. Without a weapon of any kind, resistance would be undignified, not just useless.

A laugh was struggling for command of him. Only Marcelle had known enough to base his exposure on certainty rather than shrewd guesswork.

The Master of Dragons went on, "You should not be surprised!" Without turning his head, he spoke to the murky red shadows: and the screen nearest the desk was folded aside. "Here is Marcelle Walraevens, Lieutenant Jordan. Or have you forgotten her? If you had pried into the ancient wisdom of the East only half as diligently as you did into our affairs, you would have learned that silence is best."

The blonde girl's glance fell, rose again. Her mouth tightened, and the tension of her face somehow made it different from the features Jordan had carried in his memory from Sandakan to Palawan.

"Hello, darling," he said, and chuckled whimsically. "Imagine meeting you here, when we had a whole island to stumble around on. Those lads standing behind your chair, friends? Am I supposed to know them—you know, my memory is poor. Though the Japs are said to have a cure for *that!*"

He had paused often enough to give her a chance to break in, but she had nothing to say. The two robed men behind and at either side of her stood with hands tucked into flowing sleeves. Getting no comment from the group, Jordan addressed the Master of Dragons, though he was not able to shift his glance entirely from Marcelle.

"It was simple, Your Excellency Behind the Mask. Is there anything that I really should explain?"

The Dragon's voice began to betray his amusement. "Your bungling extended from beginning to end. In Dilhi, we found your badly worn shoes, and the remains of clothing so damaged that not even a Chinaman would salvage them, which indicated that you had arrived overland, and not by sea.

"So, you must have passed the landing field, but without stopping as Harry Hewitt would naturally have done. After Sugi's mysterious disappearance from the *Funchal,* only an impostor would have failed

to take charge of the papers in his stateroom."

Reaction now made Jordan weary. He could not much longer maintain his front of careless whimsy. "My error," he said, wearily.

"You could do me a favor," the Master of Dragons proposed, very pleasantly. "There are things I wish to know, and you could gain concessions by telling me. That is why you are here, alive."

XIV

WHAT the Master of Dragons proposed was routine; many an agent, tripped up, buys his life by selling out his employer, or his country. No doubt that the masked man offered a bona fide bargain, but Jordan made a burping sound. "I could, of course, trust *bushido?*"

The Master ignored the insult to Jap code of honor. He waited for a moment; the engine of a plane roared and drummed as the ground crew warmed her up. Then, as the first thunder subsided to an even rumbling, he went on, "I can afford to bargain with you, simply because within a few hours, neither your life nor even your liberty would at all annoy us."

"War declared?"

"War," the Dragon echoed. "I have some naval code which you can help me crack. The dispatch concerns the savages of Luzon, and not your own race, so there is no real point of honor involved."

That offer put Jordan on his toes; for while pretended difficulties and outright falsifications would quickly trip him up, he could gain a few hours. But to be convincing, he had to demur awhile."

"American officers are commanding Philippino troops."

"The troops will revolt when the first gun is fired, and your fellow officers will have to surrender. Our fifth column has done good work."

"If I could believe that—but even so, I don't like it."

Then Marcelle cut in, sharply, "Lieutenant, don't be a fool! Or haven't you learned to be practical?"

It was her contempt, her mockery that stung Jordan. He whirled, caught her eye, and noted the silent movement of her lips during that instant when their glances clashed. His flare of wrath cooled within him. He watched the hand that was on her knee, perhaps because her eyes shifted downward.

He saw the slowly curling fingers hitch up the skirt, until the hem was nearly at her knee.

He turned back to the Master of Dragons. "If I could believe that—and by the way, if I get out of this, eventually, I'll tell you why Sugi slipped. Even she doesn't know that." He choked, as from an uncontrollable surge of anger, and then turned on Marcelle.

Slugging a woman is undignified, but certainly no cause for the Master of Dragons or his retainers to be concerned; to take any notice of such loss of control would be improper. So Jordan's lunge was not hindered.

Marcelle raised one hand, as if to ward off the blow; but the other completed its fumbling gesture, and Jordan knew that he had been right: that there had been more than the eye had seen.

She still had the pistol holstered at her knee. Jap carelessness, or Jap contempt of a woman's possibilities, had made the Dragon skip that one slim bet.

As his flat hand smacked her cheek, his other hand snatched the automatic. Against the rumble of the engine outside, the thin, crisp sound of pistol fire was too frail to be noticed.

Jordan's attack surprised the Japs. They had no chance to get their hands out of their ceremonial sleeves. At such close range, it was like shooting fish in a barrel. Marcelle smashed her chair against the head of one who, rising to his knees, clawed at his robe. Whatever he was looking for, he never found it.

THE Master of Dragons doubled up, clutching his stomach. For a *coup de grâce,* Jordan lashed out with his boot; a vertebra snapped. It was over before he fairly smelled the fumes of smokeless powder.

"Get into one of those gowns," he said to Marcelle, as he stripped the master. "Walk slow—understand—we can get to the boat."

"Boat? That plane they're warming up!"

The ceremonial trappings made Marcelle's idea practical, for the masked hoods were the symbol of murder's inner circle. In a moment, Jordan was leading the way to the front, to play it double or nothing.

The office was empty. A handful of men watched the light bomber being warmed up. They bowed as they saw the black-robed figures deliberately stalk toward the runway.

Jordan was walking on air. He could hardly believe that nerve and a black hood would carry him through, but having already died in that endless cat-and-mouse game with the Master of Dragons, he considered nothing entirely impossible, or even dangerous. He said in Japanese, "Emergency! New orders when we take off."

The rumble of the motor made his voice sound like any other Jap's; there was too much noise for tone or inflection to register. He hoped that no one would notice Marcelle's shoes—he hoped that she'd follow him to the cabin without slips—

There was no reason for pilot or ground crew to doubt that anything could be wrong. The chocks were pulled, and the engine was gunned; she raced down the runway, took off, cleared the surrounding jungle, and banked toward the Sulu Sea.

The pilot was busy. He never knew what hit him. Jordan thrust the pistol into Marcelle's hand and said, "Get the bombardier, and get him the first time."

He took the controls, leveled off.

Seconds seemed hours. Then Marcelle stumbled forward, and cried, "He's done."

"I'm not! We can make better time if we drop these eggs."

He told her how to release the bombs. To hell with sighting, drop them anywhere! As a farewell gesture, it had its merits, and if he hit anything, all the better. By the time Marcelle was sure she had the right lever, Jordan had circled. Landing lights went on again; reasonably enough, the ground crew thought that the Master of Dragons was returning to pick up something forgotten in the hurry of last minute changes of plan.

Jordan felt the sudden lightening of the load. Then the plane bounced and shuddered from the terrific concussion below. As he swung again toward the Sulu Sea, Marcelle crowded against him.

"I think we must have hit more than just the runway," she said. "There's fire back there."

He could neither smell nor hear the blaze, but its murky red column told him that one of the blasts had burst a fuel storage tank, that a roaring flood surged across the headquarters end of the field. And when, despite distance and the thunder of the engines, he heard a sullen rumbling, he knew that the blaze had reached a magazine of bombs.

This made up for the chance he had missed at Dilhi.

Jordan crash-landed near Sandakan without being shot down by interceptor patrols. Since the Jap pilot had a paper skull, that tap on the temple with the barrel of an automatic kept him from telling anyone where he had intended to lay his eggs; but this lack of information, which ordinarily would have been annoying, was hardly noticed. Before Jordan had half begun to account for himself and his arrival in a captured bomber, Sandakan's radio announced the surprise party at Pearl Harbor.

Later, he said to Marcelle, "I begin to think that for the first and last time in his life, the Master of Dragons told the truth.

It seems the Japs really were getting ready for hostilities."

"And now—finally—you're convinced I didn't sell you out, that I actually was kidnapped in Sandakan and put right back on that Portuguese tub?"

Jordan eyed her for a long moment. "I felt low and foolish, for a couple of lifetimes, when they jerked that screen away from you. But somehow, even before you ran your skirt to half mast, I didn't go all the way in jumping at conclusions, I had a hunch that the Master of Dragons was trying to play us against each other."

"But I still don't know why you flew to Sandakan instead of to Zamboanga and United States territory."

"Because I took the masked marvel at his word when he hinted at war by sunrise, and it seemed to me that we both needed a quiet spot, where you could help me wait for orders. Hey, what in hell have you got to cry about?"

"You'll be leaving—for Australia—and Lord knows—how long it'll be—before you can have your face remodeled—so you'll look like yourself."

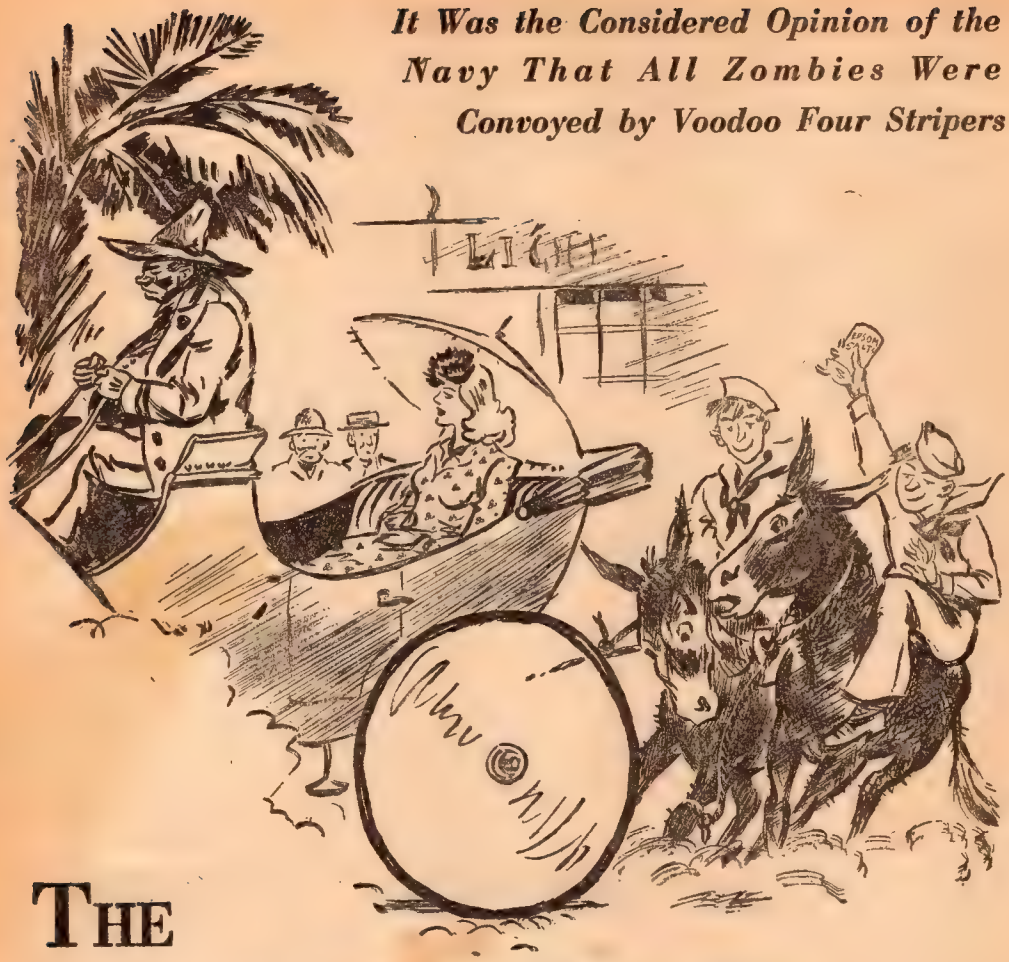
"Honey," he said, retrieving her badly twisted handkerchief, "that is just because you never saw me before I met the late Harry Hewitt. The only good thing about that Nazi was his face, and I'm keeping that! Now buck up, there's a war on, and a damn good one."

The Coyote

By S. OMAR BARKER

THE coyote—call him KI-ote, please—
Is not a healthy brute to tease.
For though oft tamed to make a pet,
Beware! The wolf lurks in him yet!
His yellow eyes are most inscrutable;
His nose is sharp, but hardly rootable.
The western night quite often he
Makes weird with wild cacophony.
His howl, 'tis said, foretells bad weather.
One of him sounds like ten together.
Though said to feed on rats and rabbits,
Quite varied are his eating habits.
Wild plums and grapes are coyote candy,
And watermelons, if they're handy.
Corn on the cob, bird's eggs and fishes,
Grasshoppers, too, he finds delishes.
When running from you, motor idling,
You'll note the coyote's gait is sidling,
But when his muscles mesh in high gear,
His straight-away outspeeds the tigeer.
Though sorely hunted as predaceous,
His howl still haunts the open spaceous—
This prowling prince of yapping drollery,
Who does not practice birth controllery!

It Was the Considered Opinion of the Navy That All Zombies Were Convoyed by Voodoo Four Stripers



THE ZOMBIE CHASERS

By ROBERT R. MILL

Author of "The Head Hunters," etc.

HAITI, the Black Republic, had done service out of all proportion to its size in promoting unity among the Pan-American nations. Therefore, it was only fitting that Haiti's big brother, the United States, should make a slight payment on account.

That payment was delivered by a rusty freighter that lumbered into the beautiful bay that forms the harbor of Port-au-Prince, nosed up to a dock, and proceeded to unload a cargo of anti-aircraft guns designed for the protection of this, one of the jewel-cities of the Caribbean.

Insurance for the safe delivery of this cargo had been provided by two rakish looking, flush-deck destroyers of First World War vintage, the U.S.S. *Gilpin* and the U.S.S. *Fitch,* the youthful skippers of which decided to reward faithful performance of duty by granting shore leave to certain deserving members of their crews.

Aboard the *Gilpin,* that classification included Mr. Thomas Porter, a tall, rangy youth, whose fiery red hair earned him the

title, "Brick," and whose rating was seaman first class.

One of the *Fitch's* contributions to the gaiety of Haiti was Mr. Richard Howard, whose plump, owlish-looking face had caused him to be known as "Prof," and whose rating and tastes were similar to those of Mr. Porter.

The two gentlemen met in a certain waterfront establishment which, in happier times, had been known as the Tourist Cafe, but which had trimmed its sails to economic storms, and now rejoiced in the title, Navy Bar.

Outwardly, the meeting was a prosaic affair.

"Hello, sailor," said Mr. Porter.

"Hello, sailor," responded Mr. Howard.

AT THIS point, the almost white proprietor took a part in the proceedings. Approaching the table occupied by the two gentlemen, he welcomed them to Haiti, and then proceeded to deliver a lecture upon the virtues of Haitian rum, which, he lamented, was not available generally outside of Haiti.

This sad state of affairs drew instant sympathy from Mr. Porter.

"Can't have that," he declared. "It's discrimination. Nations of Americas have to share their products. We send you—" The speaker groped mentally for a suitable commodity.

"Fur coats," suggested Mr. Howard.

"That's it," agreed Mr. Porter, as he paused to mop the perspiration from his brow. "We send you fur coats, and you send us rum." He turned to his companion. "Remind me to take that up with Secretary Knox the next time we have lunch with him."

Mr. Howard, however, was looking more owlish than usual, and he had adopted the professorial manner that accompanied the role.

"Can't just shoot the breeze until we are sure we know what we are talking about," he pointed out. "If we take on this detail, we got to have everything shipshape. Mean a lot of research work."

Mr. Porter was more than willing; so willing, in fact, that Mr. Howard was moved to declare, "And I want an entry on the log that—"

This complaint was silenced by the proprietor, who appeared with materials sufficient for extended research work. The study included different brands and vintages. It progressed to the satisfaction of all parties concerned until Mr. Howard, ever the exacting scientist, raised the objection:

"Got to have a basis of comparison."

The proprietor was equal to the occasion. He produced rums from Cuba, Porto Rico, Jamaica, the Virgin Islands, Barbados, Trinidad and other ports of call. One and all they were tested, and each sampling required a comparative sip of the Haitian product.

Both gentlemen were somewhat red of face when the senior scientist announced his findings:

"After taking two bottles of your kidney and liver pills— No, thash not right. Drink Haitian rum and you'll never drink—"

Mr. Porter took over:

"What he means is that Haitian rum makes this other stuff taste like bilge water."

The proprietor beamed his approval.

"*Merci,* gentlemens. I meex you vairy special dreenk."

He returned with two large glasses. Mr. Howard sipped his offering experimentally, but Mr. Porter took a big gulp, and coughed violently.

"What the devil is that?" he demanded, when temporary calm had been restored.

"Zat," declared the proprietor, "ees ze zombie."

The room stopped spinning around long enough for the erudite Mr. Howard to furnish an explanation:

"Zombies are dead people that won't stay dead."

"Like Naval Reserve ensigns?" asked Mr. Porter.

"Worse than that," Mr. Howard asserted. "The voodoo priests bring 'em back to life and make 'em work. You never saw a Ninety-Day-Wonder work."

Mr. Porter paid tribute to a foe worthy of his steel.

"If I took another swig of that drink, I'd be one of those zombies. Maybe there is something to this voodoo stuff."

"Zaire is much voodoo in Haiti," said the proprietor.

"Did you ever sight one of these zombies?" demanded Mr. Porter.

The resort owner hesitated.

"I—I zink so," he hedged.

"Stop looking at me," Mr. Howard ordered. "And tell that palm to stand still."

Mr. Porter, however, was in the throes that accompanied the birth of a great idea.

"We have to shove off on a scouting mission. Maybe we can sight one of these zombies." Virtue surged over him. "Be better than staying anchored in this joint, with nothing to do but swill rum and shoot the breeze."

Painful past experience caused Mr. Howard to launch his stock protest:

"Want it entered on the log that—"

"Seexteen dolers, seexty-five cents, Americaine," said the proprietor, who noted signs the armada was about to get underway.

"This voyage," declared Mr. Porter, "will be—will be educational. Like that wind-jammer from the U.S.O. said, 'The Navy furnishes educational advantages, but you guys have to take advantage of 'em.' You can do chair fatigue here, but—"

"Seexteen dolers, seex—"

"Send the chit to the Haitian Rum Distillers' Benevolent and Patriotic Association," Mr. Porter ordered.

"No," ruled Mr. Howard, "you pick it up. You are hell-bent on getting educated, and education costs money."

Outside on the street, they became unsteady participants in a very colorful procession. The predominant color of the people was black, but now and again they passed Haitians, mostly members of the upper class, with skins as white as their own. The entire scene, in fact, was a study in contrasts. Peasants in rags rubbed elbows with beautiful women wearing gowns that owed their origin to the smartest shops in New York. Beautiful tropical bungalows were spaced with palm-thatched huts that would have done credit to a Hollywood jungle set. The heavy traffic included both the latest offerings from Detroit and almost countless small, plodding donkeys, known locally as bourriques, each of which was mounted by a peasant woman, on her way to or from the markets with the wares of the country.

Through this colorful scene moved Mr. Porter, driven by a rum-created thirst for education, and agog over the possibility of sighting a zombie in the flesh. At his unsteady heels tottered Mr. Howard, with absolutely no yen for learning, and with grave misgivings regarding the outcome of the expedition, but held in formation by blind loyalty to a well-meaning but misguided comrade.

Three long blocks of this failed to produce a single person that even a rum-inspired imagination could endow with zombie-like qualities. Mr. Howard, attempting to cash in on Mr. Porter's dislike for walking, tried to create a diversion.

"Maybe the wind isn't right for zombies."

Mr. Porter favored him with a withering glance.

"What does that have to do with it?"

"I wouldn't know," Mr. Howard admitted, "but it affects fishing."

The zombie hunt continued, with Mr. Porter leading the safari. The trail entered the downtown business section, and there it encountered what Mr. Howard fondly hoped would be a rival attraction.

It was an old-fashioned open carriage, drawn by two undersized Haitian nags, and driven by a very black coachman.

"Pipe the quail!" ordered Mr. Howard, jerking a thumb at the lone occupant of the rear seat of the conveyance.

Mr. Porter, obeying instructions, peered through an alcoholic haze and saw a blon-dined, over-dressed, hard-featured girl, who, thanks to the rums of many nations, dissolved into a composite Garbo-Sheridan-Turner-Lamour, retaining the best features of each.

"Very trim," was the comment of Mr. Porter, who proceeded to wave an enthusiastic greeting. "Here is hoping the 'Adopt-a-Sailor' movement has spread to Haiti."

The conduct of the young lady was beyond reproach. She glanced neither to port nor to starboard. The carriage continued underway, with Mr. Porter, his interests having undergone a quick shift from zombies to blondes, in hot pursuit.

On the rear seat, the girl remained as lifeless as a doll, gazing straight ahead with unseeing eyes as the carriage came to a halt before a mercantile establishment. Without a word to the driver, she stepped to the sidewalk, and there she came face to face with the erstwhile zombie hunters.

Mr. Howard, hoping to keep the zombie phase of their activities submerged, did the honors. He removed his white cap, bowed, and spoke in what he believed was French:

"Bun jewer, madadmowsell."

The assertion, "the girl ignored them," would be gross under-statement. Her face was sphinx-like as she bore down upon them, looked straight through them with unseeing eyes, and literally swept into the store.

Mr. Howard scratched his head ruefully.

"I don't get it," he admitted. "She didn't savvy. The upper class speak good French, and the peasants use a lingo they call Creole. That quail is strictly good duty, and I used my best French on her."

BY THIS time Mr. Porter's one-track mind had returned to its original groove.

"Didn't savvy!" he retorted. "She didn't even see us! No quail in her right mind is going to pass up two guys like us in a port where white men are as scarce as human kindness in the heart of a two-and-a-half-striper." He used a convenient lamp-post to maintain an even keel while he announced his findings: "That quail is a zombie!"

Mr. Howard thought fast. His first impulse was to point out the obvious faults in Mr. Porter's diagnosis, and thereby avert present dangers. He was restrained by fears that such a course might lead to graver dangers than those apparent in the pursuit of a pretty girl.

"Maybe," he hedged.

"Maybe!" Mr. Porter loaded the word with rum-inspired scorn. "That quail can't see, she can't hear, and she can't talk. She might as well be dead, but she's walking around. Doesn't that make her a zombie?"

"Maybe." Mr. Howard stuck to his guns.

Mr. Porter, however, considered the point won, and was off on another tack.

"Is there any cure for 'em?"

Mr. Howard drew upon lore obtained from lurid books on Haiti.

"Yep. Salt."

"Salt?" Mr. Porter repeated. "Oh, I savvy. Like catching birds. You sprinkle salt on their—"

"No," Mr. Howard corrected. "Not there. You feed it to 'em."

Mr. Porter's befuddled intellect digested this information. Then his eyes penetrated the mist in search of a likely source of salt. He settled for a drug store, in which a non-English-speaking clerk, after patiently trying to understand shouted words and animated sign language, compromised by leading the customer to long shelves of bottles, and allowing him to make his own selection.

Mr. Howard, meanwhile, prayed devoutly that the girl would reappear and disappear before Mr. Porter returned. This pious hope was somewhat dampened by the coachman, who was enjoying a deep and

noisy sleep, which indicated that the process of getting underway was far in the future.

This fear proved well founded, for the first change in the status quo was furnished by Mr. Porter, who hove into sight with a paper cup in his left hand, a bottle of Epsom salts in his right, and intense purpose mirrored in both bleary eyes.

Mr. Howard shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't know whether that's the right brand," he stalled. "And the book says it doesn't really cure them. If they eat salt, they know they are zombies. Then they shove off for the cemetery, and climb into their graves." Now he saw a good opening. "That quail is too trim to be stowed away in a grave."

Mr. Porter, however, refused to yield the point.

"She isn't wired for sound, she can't savvy her own lingo, and she can't see two guys who mean only good to her. What percentage is there in her walking around? She'd be more snug in her berth out in the graveyard."

He tightened his grip upon the bottle.

"Don't give it to her here," warned Mr. Howard, who shifted his attack by adopting a mysterious manner. "These zombies are convoyed by voodoo four-stripers. If he saw you cutting in on his racket by curing this one, he would do his stuff." The speaker shook his head darkly. "They make your image in wax, and stick spikes in it. You croak on the tenth spike."

Foggy recollections of a lurid story in the Sunday supplement of a tabloid returned to cause Mr. Porter to give some slight credence to Mr. Howard's warning, but Mr. Porter was not given to shirking danger, and least of all while in his cups. A hasty glance about for potential sources of peril revealed only the sleeping coachman, whose open mouth reminded Mr. Porter of the New Jersey entrance to the Holland Tunnel.

Mr. Howard continued the build-up designed to avert trouble.

"The smart thing to do is to trail this quail, and slip her the salt when the voodoo four-striper is off watch and below decks."

The seed fell on fertile ground, but Mr. Porter's assent was choked off as he examined the ancient carriage and the two horses.

"What is the cruising speed of that rig?" he demanded.

"Slow," Mr. Howard assured him.

"They might run under forced draft and give us trouble," Mr. Porter objected. His roving glance strayed to a vacant lot, directly behind the carriage, where peasant women had tied their donkeys while they attended the market. Mr. Porter's face lighted with pleasure caused by the speed at which his ready mind had found a solution.

Disregarding Mr. Howard's protests, he entered the lot, calmly appropriated odd lengths of rope that were scattered about, and began to tie the donkeys to each other. Judged impartially, it was not a seamanlike job. The left hind leg of one animal was attached to the halter of another, the tail of which was roped to the right front leg of a third animal. That done, Mr. Porter did a splicing job that enabled him to stretch a rope from the donkey nearest the curb to the rear axle of the carriage.

"Help bend this knot," he ordered his companion.

Mr. Howard obliged, but under protest.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded.

Mr. Porter beamed over his own ingenuity.

"Act as a sea-anchor, and slow them down to normal cruising speed." He

added an afterthought. "And if our dogs go back on us, we can ship as passengers aboard the donkeys."

But Mr. Howard, strange to relate, was definitely not sold on this brilliant idea.

"I want it entered on the log—"

"Stow it!" ordered Mr. Porter. "The other jackasses haven't passed down a growl. Why should you?"

INSIDE the store, the girl Mr. Porter had tagged as a zombie remained in character as she walked through the main part of the establishment, not deigning to notice two clerks, and showing emotion only when a door at the rear failed to open at her first knock. The brief delay caused the lady to register violent annoyance.

Soon, however, a swarthy Syrian ushered her into a rear compartment that overlooked the harbor. This gentleman had put in a busy day. After using powerful glasses to observe the arrival of the freighter and the two destroyers, he had consulted "Jane's Fighting Ships," a volume which enabled him to definitely type the destroyers. That being done, he had occupied himself by counting the anti-aircraft guns being unloaded from the freighter. At occasional intervals he had received reports from sundry gentlemen who had been active along the waterfront, and who were able to venture opinions regarding the return cargo of the freighter and the date of departure of the convoy.

All this data had been noted on a sheet of paper, which the Syrian handed to the girl. She read it, folded the page, and placed it in the neck of her dress. The Syrian then requested her to wait the arrival of another gentleman, who would have later and more reliable information. The girl's reply, if Mr. Porter could have heard it, and if it could have been translated for him, certainly would have caused him to brand her as a most unladylike zombie. Nevertheless, she sat on a counter and drummed her high heels impatiently.

In due time the tardy gentleman appeared with the information that the freighter was taking aboard a mixed cargo of sisal and sugar, and that she and the guardian destroyers were expected to depart on flood tide the following morning. The informant followed this with a demand for money, which was honored by the Syrian, while the girl looked on with lofty disdain. This accomplished, and with the population of the room again reduced to two, the girl accepted from the Syrian a package, which was designed to explain her visit to the shop, and took her departure.

She had the same mechanical walk and the same unseeing eyes as she seated herself on the rear seat of the carriage. Nothing happened, for the very good reason that the Haitian coachman had entered the third and soundest stage of his nap, while Messrs. Porter and Howard and their mounts were shielded from view by a corner of the building. The girl brought her open hand down smartly upon the reclining head of the driver, and the party was under way.

The driver awoke, blinked once, and automatically lashed out at the horses. Mr. Porter applied a toe to the flank of the first donkey. Mr. Howard performed a like service for the rear animal. The middle donkey, in response to pressure fore and aft, also got under way.

At the start, the gait of the not overly ambitious horses was adapted to the cruising speed of the donkeys, so that the somewhat unusual sight of a carriage containing a girl, and towing three donkeys, which were attended by two sailors, caused only mildly raised eyebrows along one of the main business streets of Port-au-Prince. This happy state of affairs was brought to an end by two factors.

Mr. Porter, having had his fill of walking, mounted the donkey. At the same time, the coachman decided in favor of more speed, and gave the necessary signal to the horses. The donkey, despite frantic urging from Mr. Porter, refused to

cooperate. The result was that the tow rope became taut, and the horses, being of no mind to accept an additional burden, came to a dead stop.

The girl swore fluently in French. The driver applied the whip to the horses, but to no avail. Mr. Porter labored with the donkey, which, despite the familiar aroma of Haitian rum, had sniffed out something alien and disturbing about Mr. Porter.

"He talks French!" yelled Mr. Howard, from a vantage spot on the quarter-deck of the third donkey. "Tell him *'alons!'* or *'avante'* or something like that."

This advice was of little help to Mr. Porter, but it did serve to bring the tow to the attention of the girl, who promptly let out a scream. The coachman gave an excited cry. Messrs. Porter and Howard contributed assorted profanity, some of which was directed at the donkeys and some at each other. The excitement spread to the onlookers, one of whom bawled lustily for the gendarmerie.

The sight of rapidly approaching uniforms spurred Mr. Porter into action. He hastily abandoned ship. Mr. Howard made an equally unceremonious departure from his donkey. Following procedure that had proved its worth in the past, Mr. Porter headed due north, while Mr. Howard put on full speed ahead in the opposite direction.

Both gentlemen were carrying too much ballast to establish any records, but their several escapes were accomplished because the first Haitian policemen to arrive on the scene encountered an immediate problem in the shape of one blonde, very mad; one coachman much befuddled; two horses thoroughly frightened and very active with hooves and teeth; three donkeys, stubborn as only donkeys can be, and one constantly growing, excited crowd—all of which by this time was thoroughly tangled.

THEREFORE, it came to pass that Mr. Howard found himself, unpursued, in a remote part of the business district, from which, with only slight difficulty, he was able to beat his way back to the original base of operations, the Navy Bar.

Mr. Porter, on the other hand, steered a more devious course, which led to the best residential district of the city. His requests for information regarding his whereabouts met with polite lifting of hats, smiles, shrugs of shoulders and French—none of which he found useful. But even in his bewilderment, instinct enabled him to spot various drinking establishments, at each of which he paused to obtain a refill of Haitian rum, a process accomplished easily by pointing to the ever-present bottles.

In one of these establishments he encountered a Haitian, whose attributes included ability to speak good English, affection for America and all things American, a great thirst, and a complete lack of money.

Mr. Porter and this gentleman complemented each other, and there followed a mutually pleasant hour, at the conclusion of which the Haitian, hoping to prolong the session, brought up the subject of voodoo, and eventually reached the sub-division of zombies. This served to awaken a dormant purpose in the mind of Mr. Porter, who was all ears as his companion declared:

"Just last year a peasant woman brought seven men to Hasco—that is the Haitian-American Sugar Company—and had them employed. They acted strange, but they did what they were told. Every morning the woman brought them to work, she came at noon to give them their dinner, and she called for them at night. She also collected their wages."

The speaker paused to refer to his glass.

"But at the time of the carnival the woman left the men in the care of her husband. He used salt in the preparation of their food. When the zombies ate it, they knew they were dead. They ran through the streets of this city to the cemetery, and climbed into their graves.

That, my friend, is not a story; it is fact."

The Haitian prepared to defend his statement, but Mr. Porter had only a question:

"Are there girl zombies?"

"But, certainly." His informant thought he saw a chance to reap additional profit. "Nice young girl zombies, and very willing to please visiting Americans. It will be a pleasure to—"

"Put the thought on ice," Mr. Porter directed. "Do you happen to know a blonde dame who drives around in a carriage with two horses?" He added detail.

"But, yes," declared his new-found friend. "All Port-au-Prince knows her. She is Mademoiselle Marie Labarge, a war refugee from Paris."

Mr. Porter's excitement mounted.

"Do you know where she lives?"

"But, yes. It is not far from here."

"Let's go!" Mr. Porter ordered.

The trail led to a two-story bungalow. There was no doubt regarding identity, for the two horses were tied to a palm tree in the yard, and the Haitian coachman was on the front seat of the carriage, deep in the second installment of his interrupted nap.

Then caution overcame Mr. Porter. He led his friend around the corner, and had him write the street address on a piece of paper. Also, because this friend was beginning to pall upon him, he demanded to be led to the Navy Bar.

There, as he had expected, he found Mr. Howard. By presenting a united front, and by making a joint cash contribution, they were able to dispense with the services of the Haitian. Then followed a period during which Mr. Porter listened in silence to bitter recriminations from Mr. Howard regarding the folly of the mission which had come so close to disaster.

Mr. Porter wisely bided his time, relying upon good Haitian rum to bring Mr. Howard back to a state in which he would be amenable to reason. Thanks to a substantial base acquired during solo work previous to the arrival of Mr. Porter, that time soon arrived, and Mr. Porter opened the attack.

He painted a vivid word picture of the girl, doomed to the life of a zombie, and in the power of some voodoo four-striper. Mr. Howard's interest was academic. Mr. Porter appealed to the manhood of his companion. Mr. Howard was practical:

"Even if I was fool enough to cut myself in on this detail with you, how would we spot her? I am not going to cruise all over Port-au-Prince, and—"

Mr. Porter produced the paper containing the address. Mr. Howard showed interest, but he also displayed caution:

"I want it entered on the log that—"

Mr. Porter, sensing that his cause was as good as won, jerked a thumb skyward, where a huge tropical moon had replaced the fiery sun.

"That voodoo four-striper has to bed down sooner or later. When he's below decks, we'll order away a boarding party." He reached in his jumper, and produced the bottle of Epsom salts. "Then we'll slip that poor quail zombie a dose of this, and send her back to the cemetery where she can get some rest."

Mr. Howard staggered to his feet.

"I'm against it," he declared. "Want an entry in the log. But you can't say that the Howards aren't chiv—chiv—hic!—that the Howards haven't guts. Let's shove off!"

THE proprietor of the bar, yielding to pressure, regretfully turned them over to an English-speaking taxicab driver, who proceeded leisurely in the general direction of the address furnished by Mr. Porter. Driving in the balmy night air had a sobering effect, and soon Mr. Howard felt, and expressed, the return of certain qualms regarding the outcome of their mission. Mr. Porter met this emergency by issuing iron rations, which took the form of a bottle of

rum that appeared from his jumper. Gurgling sounds drowned out Mr. Howard's protests and his qualms.

When the car came to a halt a short distance from the bungalow, Mr. Porter issued instructions:

"Keep the bow headed for the harbor, and set the engine room telegraph at 'stand by.'"

"Oui, Monsieur," said the driver, who gathered that he was being told to wait. "Eef you no haf luck here, I know Spanish ladees. Vairy preety. Vairy white."

Mr. Porter frowned upon this offer.

"Issuing Spanish quail on a French island would be like taking a ham sandwich to a banquet." He turned to his companion. "Get underway, sailor."

They approached the bungalow on a reconnaissance mission, and were rewarded by seeing an open, lighted window on the second floor, directly above the roof of a porch. The front of that porch was screened by bougainvillea vines, which extended to the roof.

Mr. Porter removed his shoes. Mr. Howard followed his example. Together they scaled the vines, and made their way none too quietly across a tin roof.

The open window commanded a view of a hall, at one end of which was an open door, through which they had a limited glimpse of a lighted room. And there was the object of their search.

The girl's back was arched over what appeared to be some sort of a mahogany desk, which had elaborate carvings.

Mr. Howard's eyes widened.

"Voodoo altar!" he whispered hoarsely.

The girl bent even lower, and, apparently reading from a slip of paper, spoke some strange jargon into the desk, the greater portion of which was hidden from the gentlemen on the roof by her back.

"Voodoo hokus-pokus!" was Mr. Howard's whispered explanation.

"See any signs of the voodoo four-striper?" asked Mr. Porter.

Mr. Howard, trying to obtain a better view, stuck his head in the open window.

Meanwhile, things were happening down on the street. Port-au-Prince has an efficient police department, and one of its members, while making his rounds, was attracted by the somewhat unusual sight of two gentlemen crawling across a tin roof. After calling from a box on the corner for reinforcements, he returned to take up a post behind a convenient palm tree.

Reserves in sufficient strength to capture a pill-box arrived on the scene just as Mr. Howard stuck his head in the window, and Mr. Porter, thinking that the great moment was at hand, produced the bottle of Epsom salts for quick use.

Both gentlemen were more than mildly surprised to hear a shouted command. It was in French, but both gentlemen understood it perfectly, and reacted in different ways.

Mr. Howard at once grasped a terra cotta drainpipe, and swung himself onto the sloping roof of the bungalow. This action was inspired by the befuddled belief that once he had climbed over the peak of

that roof he would be out of sight of the gentlemen on the ground, and, therefore, safe from pursuit.

Mr. Porter, however, tarried long enough to glance down at the upturned faces and clutching hands of a number of very black policemen. Almost since birth Mr. Porter had been allergic to policemen of all races, colors and creeds, and he took an instant dislike to these particular policemen. To avoid more intimate contact with them, he took a flying leap into the nearby branches of a large tree that towered above the bungalow, and which is known in Haiti as a cha-cha tree.

His groping fingers encountered solid wood, but slipped. His falling body followed the fingers. Again the fingers grabbed, and this time they encountered metal. This time the grip held, but the object grasped did not. Thus it was that Mr. Porter, after a hurried, scratchy descent, found himself upon the ground, clutching a long length of copper wire, which had been torn loose from the tree.

The policemen pounced upon Mr. Porter. But the festivities were halted by one of them, who wore the silver bar of a lieutenant. He saw the wire, bent to examine it, used his electric torch to identify the uniform worn by Mr. Porter, and then cast a speculative glance at the bungalow. He next spoke in French to Mr. Porter, who answered in English, and the exchange got just nowhere.

Thereupon, the Haitian lieutenant issued orders. His men gained entrance to the bungalow by battering down the front door. The officer then smiled, and extended his hand to the man on the ground.

Mr. Porter blinked, rubbed his eyes, and made a mental vow to swear off drinking. When you were caught on a strange roof, and the cop who caught you wanted to shake hands, it was time for drastic action. But this was no mirage, for when Mr. Porter doubtfully extended his hand the Haitian seized it and wrung it enthusiastically.

A disheveled, protesting Mr. Howard was led to the scene by other policemen. But he was equally bewildered when his captors, after instructions from the lieutenant, released him and clapped him on the back approvingly.

"No more rum!" he muttered.

More policemen emerged from the house, dragging the blonde, the desk and an assortment of wires with them. The clang of a gong told Mr. Porter the dream had ended, but while the blonde was loaded with scant ceremony, he and Mr. Howard moved under their own power, and in response to an invitation composed of bows, smiles and approving pats.

"It's still a pie-wagon," mourned Mr. Howard. "But let's get aboard. The last time I couldn't get a seat."

ON THIS occasion, however, they were bowed into choice seats near the driver.

The journey was enlivened by the blonde, who interrupted her stream of profanity only long enough to make an unsuccessful attempt to claw the faces of Messrs. Porter and Howard, an act which drew her a sound slap in the face from the blackest of the policemen.

At Police Headquarters, the lady drew a cell, while the two visiting delegates were bowed into a comfortable office, made to feel at home, and then left alone.

"What does your dim mind make of all this?" demanded Mr. Howard.

Mr. Porter groped for a solution.

"They have something on that quail. Maybe that voodoo stuff is against the law."

Mr. Howard's snort was eloquent.

"I never heard of them declaring an open season on porch-climbing in Haiti."

This exchange was halted by the arrival of a tall, handsome man, whose skin was the color of coffee and cream. He wore the oak leaves of a major, and he looked every inch a soldier.

"Good evening, gentlemen." He bowed.

"I am Major LeClerc, of the Guard of Haiti."

Mr. Porter came out of the ether long enough to give his own name and rank, and to perform a like service for his companion.

The major bowed again.

"Unfortunately, Lieutenant Frankel speaks no English. I have the honor of congratulating you on your successful haul. The lovely lady will send no more radio messages to U-boats lying in the Windward Passage, off Haiti."

Mr. Porter kicked Mr. Howard, who, at that exact moment, kicked Mr. Porter.

"I suppose Naval Intelligence is quite busy these days," continued the Haitian officer.

Mr. Porter found his voice:

"Very busy, Major."

The major spoke apologetically:

"Your country and mine are firm allies, and nothing can disturb our relations. However, I do wish circumstances had made it possible for you to have consulted us before proceeding with this matter." He smiled. "Not that we have any desire to detract from your glory, but it would make for better cooperation in the future."

Mr. Porter moistened his lips with his tongue.

"If it please the major, we'll be very glad to get along without any glory. Be better for all hands if we just vanish over the horizon, and your outfit announce the bag as part of your regular duty. You can count on us keeping our tongues belayed."

"Yes, sir," declared Mr. Howard. "If the major will steer that course, we sure will pipe down on the chatter. We'll be as mum as—" he shot a dirty look at his partner in crime—"as mum as a zombie that's had salt in her chow."

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THE DEVIL'S MASTER

Money Sure Draws Knives in This Man's Town

By CADDO CAMERON

Author of "Flowers for a Bandit," etc.

WHEN he left his hotel in old Mexico City to take a stroll on Street of the Silversmiths the lanky red-headed fugitive from Texas, James Mahoney Doane, had no idea that he'd get tangled in a murder before going two blocks. On the contrary, he was at peace with the world this perfect June evening and the world was smiling at him.

The street swarmed with its usual assortment of colorful and interesting humanity, all manner of folks from all corners of the earth wearing every imaginable garb, each contributing his touch of color in dress and character whether it be drab or brilliant, honest or otherwise. Even the beggars were picturesque in their rags and deformities. And against the clouds that lingered over the valley in the wake of an afternoon shower the setting sun projected an extravaganza in color that cast its reflection upon the scene below.

Although Jimmy Doane had spent much of his life in Mexico he never tired of the country or its people. As he ambled down the narrow sidewalk his long lean face frequently broke into a grin that erased the somewhat cynical lines which hard experiences had left behind. It was easy for Red to grin this evening. For example—a mournful donkey with only its front and hind ends protruding from between two huge baskets of charcoal was a familiar sight, but yonder was one with a naked Indian baby atop each basket and he grinned at that. And there were the bright-eyed little boys and girls selling sweets and flowers who got his smiles. Jimmy had always been a sucker for them and today he was at their mercy. They got the tall *Americano's* silver, too, and when one of them circled through the crowd and met him again as if it were their first meeting he laughed and gave the little slicker twice as much as he had previously.

Red also liked to catch the eye of older girls, the carefully guarded beauties in passing carriages of the rich. Some were personal acquaintances and most of them no doubt knew him by sight and reputation, for Don Diego Doane—as he was called—was more or less famous as a very gentlemanly and successful bandit who, because of his loyalty to the government, stood high in the regard of federal authorities and low

in the estimation of certain governors of border states. Some chaperones frowned at the handsome Texan, but not *too* many.

Jimmy presently became aware that a stranger was walking beside him, on his right next to the buildings, a natty little Mexican with iron-gray hair and mustaches and the face of a scholar. The man behaved as if he were celebrating some joyous occasion. He joked with peddlers who accosted him, gave freely to beggars and when one of these displayed a horribly twisted arm then straightened it suddenly to catch a coin he laughed in high glee. Red couldn't resist a temptation to speak to this happy person.

Grinning down at him, the Texan said in polite Spanish, "Congratulations, Senor. You can laugh at the dishonesty of others, therefore you will always have something to amuse you."

The little man glanced up. His smile was quick and engaging. "Not always do I laugh this way, Senor. Sometimes I get very angry at people. But not today. A fearful burden has just been lifted from my shoulders and—"

The sentence ended in a gasp.

A man had plunged a knife into his throat!

An instant before the blow was struck Red Doane saw the assassin step from a narrow alley, caught the flash of his blade. The tall Texan acted instinctively and swiftly, but the fraction of a second too late. He whipped a gun from his shoulder holster and not daring to fire because of the crowd, struck at the murderer with the barrel of his weapon. The man staggered back. Red sprang after him, whereupon he jerked a second knife. Jimmy snapped a vicious blow to his jaw. He wilted against the wall.

Meanwhile the Texan's *mozo* (servant), Domingo Zala, a lithe young Indian in white cotton blouse and trousers, darted past him and sped up the alley to meet two men who were evidently coming to the assistance of the murderer. There was the flicker of knives. A man cried out. One of the strangers reeled backward. The other turned and fled as if the devil were after him. The wounded man sank to the ground, coughing. Domingo wiped his blade on the fellow's shirt and returned it to its scabbard under his blouse.

DOANE met the Indian in the alley. Nodding toward the knot of people around the murdered man, he said softly, "That boy who is kneeling and crying is the senor's *mozo*. Take him away before the police come and frighten him so that he will not talk. His master had lately feared some terrible thing. Find out what it was. Learn all you can about everything."

Domingo bobbed his head obediently. His broad face was wooden, but anxiety momentarily softened his fierce black eyes.

He asked, "Are you hurt, Master?"

"No, *muchacho,*" answered Jimmy kindly.

Visibly relieved, the Indian slipped quickly through the crowd and knelt beside the dying man's servant. After a few moments of whispered conversation they went away together.

The police arrived promptly. From them Jimmy learned that the dead man was an eminent scientist, Doctor Agustin de Mernandez, astronomer and meteorologist associated with the government observatory and School of Mines, a person of wealth noted for his many charities. After giving his address and promising to appear as a witness when called, the Texan returned to his room at the Iturbide and waited impatiently for Domingo.

The Indian came within an hour.

"That *mozo* is very young, Senor," he began, "and he talked freely to me because you tried to defend his master whom he loved. I have learned things, one of which is bad."

Domingo went on to say that the doctor lived in a mansion with his wife and daughter and many servants who wor-

shipped them. For at least two months a mysterious fear had prevaded the Hernandez home. The servants sensed it but could not imagine the cause until the *mozo* overheard a conversation between his master and mistress one night.

Said Domingo, "This *mozo* should have been whipped for listening, but it is lucky for us that he did. He learned that the doctor had received a letter signed 'The Assassins,' demanding much money and threatening terrible things if he notified the police. He paid no attention to it. Still another letter came and it promised vengeance on his wife or daughter or him if he failed to pay the money. That night the doctor told his senora that he would go to the police the next day. He did. He was coming from there when killed. And now, my master, I fear for you."

Jimmy Doane grinned at the devoted fellow. "But how about yourself?" he asked dryly. "My man walked away with the police. They hauled yours to the morgue."

The Indian shrugged. "I am a nothing. Besides, I have failed in my duty."

"How have you failed?"

"I could have killed both of those *pelados*. I stabbed when I should have slashed. My knife hung in his bones long enough for his companion to escape. You should punish me severely, Senor."

Jimmy got up, laughing. "Good! I will punish you. Go and eat all you can hold. Afterwards, you will follow me to the Police Headquarters and later to a cafe where you must sit at the door and watch while *I* eat."

In English, he added, "Now, git, you fightin' fool, you!"

Domingo didn't understand the English, but he got the idea and went out of there a happy Indian.

While the Texan was changing to evening clothes a short time later, a hotel servant arrived with an unstamped letter addressed to him. Asking the boy to wait, he opened the envelope. It and the paper were of fine quality, delicately perfumed, and the handwriting was the flowery Spencerian of that day showing no apparent attempt at disguise. The note was in English.

It read, "*You were a fool today. Do not be a bigger fool by helping the police. Leave Mexico City tonight. Do not come back before the Hernandez case is tried. You have already seen what happens to those who defy us.*

Los Asesinos." (*The Assassins.*)

Jimmy Doane stroked the bridge of his long nose, read the note again, then grunted.

"Where did you get this?" he asked the servant.

"I was standing at the door when a boy of the streets gave it to me, Senor. He said that he had never before seen the man who paid him to bring the letter to the hotel."

THE chief of police, General Ramon Perez—a short powerful man with a shrewd face, was working overtime at Headquarters when the Texan arrived.

He came quickly from behind his desk and offered his hand. "Good evening, Senor Doane. I am happy to have you visit me. In fact, I was at the point of calling on you."

Jimmy made an appropriately courteous reply, adding, "No doubt it is the Hernandez matter that keeps you here so late, General."

The officer's face clouded. "Yes, Senor. The doctor was my friend. He was the friend of everyone. We Mexicans loved him. We were proud of him. We will work long and hard to avenge him."

Motioning Red to a chair, he continued, "Thanks to you, Senor, we have the actual murderer. I hope to God that we get the man who paid him."

Jimmy nodded. "I think I understand, General."

He went on to describe what Domingo had reported and concluded by producing the scented letter.

Perez took it eagerly. "This paper and perfume!" he muttered grimly. "I have grown to hate them. Also the beautiful handwriting. These letters are all alike in those respects. I have thought that through them we would surely catch the writer. Such foolish bravado *should* get him caught, but it has not. He is a clever fool who succeeds where a smart professional criminal would fail."

After reading he fixed his keen eyes on the American's face. "This is serious, Senor," he declared sternly, "and I trust that you will treat it accordingly. Your safest course is to leave the city."

Jimmy grinned, shook his head. "I like it here at the beginning of the rainy season. It is delightful."

The general smiled faintly. "Of course, I knew that stout horses could not drag Don Diego Doane away from a thing like this. Very good, I will give you all the police protection I can."

Red's grin widened a trifle. "Your policemen are nice fellows, General, but there are times when the presence of *any* policeman is—ah-ah—shall I say, embarrassing?"

Perez chuckled, said dryly, "Frankly, Senor, I half expected something like that from you. It shall be as you wish. In fact, I am happy to learn that *Los Asesinos* have made so dangerous an enemy. I will tell you about them."

His manner became grim, almost savage. "Doctor Hernandez is not the only one who has defied The Assassins and paid with his life. For three years this band of extortionists has been a thorn in our side. In that time they have committed six murders that I know of and perhaps others that remain unsolved."

Red whistled softly. This was serious!

"They prey only upon those who are known to have money," continued the officer. "They single out a victim and coerce him by threats against himself and his family, constantly reminding him of the fate of those who have refused to meet their demands. Each murder they commit strengthens their influence over other victims. I am confident that some of our best citizens are now secretly suffering themselves to be bled by these assassins rather than to run the risk of reporting to the police."

"American strong-arm tactics," suggested Jimmy.

"Yes, Senor," agreed Perez, "also Italian. Do not forget that—Italian."

"We have captured four of their murderers and two collectors," he went on to say. "Three were forced to talk, but we learned little of value. None had ever seen the chief and they did not know his name.

"In each case they had received orders from total strangers described as Italians whom they never saw again. This suggests that the band operates in other places, too, and moves its men around."

General Ramon Perez leaned back in his chair, folded his arms. He looked Red Doane in the eye for fully ten seconds without saying a word, then remarked quietly, "Although I have not previously had the privilege of meeting you, Senor, you are well known to me. I am aware that you have a way of getting things done —not always legally, perhaps, but effectively nevertheless. Tomorrow the city will offer a reward of twenty-five thousand *pesos* for the death or conviction of the chief of The Assassins."

Jimmy lifted his brows. "That is a large reward, General."

Perez nodded. "Yes, Don Doane, and this is a large undertaking."

WHEN Red left the building shortly thereafter a full moon was putting the murky street lamps to shame. His hired coach stood at the curb and Domingo was there to open the door for him.

"Senor," whispered the Indian, "I suspect that a man followed us to this place. I saw him hide behind that fountain over there. The fool is smoking now. Shall I

go and catch him for his carelessness, or kill him for spying on you?"

Jimmy got in and sat down. "Your eyes are as sharp as your knives, my *mozo*. Dead, that man would be worth nothing to us. Alive, he may be worth even less, but we shall see. Now, listen."

He gave his orders with few words. Domingo took a seat beside the driver and the old coach clattered away over the cobbles. After a little while it turned into a narrow, unlighted and deserted alley. As the vehicle continued on its noisy way Red and the Indian sprang out and took cover in the deep shadows between two buildings. A few moments later the spy rounded the corner. Trotting on bare feet, the only sound he made was the swish of his leather pants.

Doane stepped quickly into the street. Moonlight picked up the white bosom of his dress shirt and glanced from the barrel of his six-shooter. The spy stumbled to a sudden halt.

"Put up your hands!" barked the Texan.

The stranger hesitated—more from confusion than anything else, perhaps. Domingo was at his side in an instant. A long knife glittered in the Indian's hand.

He hissed, "One obeys when my master commands!"

He jabbed with his blade, not *too* gently.

The spy grunted, shoved his arms high.

They took him out of the street into the shadows. Jimmy saw at a glance that his prisoner was merely one of the cheap crooks who haunted the streets of Mexico City, *leperos* they were called—the lowest class of society, beggars, thieves, murderers who'd knife a man for a dollar.

"Why are you following me, *hombre?*" he demanded.

The *lepero* answered promptly, "Because a man paid me one *medio* to follow you, my Master, and promised another when I tell him every place you went."

"Who is that man?"

"I never saw him before, Senor, and do not know his name."

"What did he look like?"

The spy spread his hands in a gesture. "He is big and wide like this and he had a grand mustache on a very pale face and much black hair on his head."

"Is he a Mexican?"

After the fashion of his kind, the crook was gaining courage because his captors had not treated him roughly. He squinted up at the tall Texan, and asked, "He was not a Mexican. You are rich. How much will you pay me to tell you what this man is?"

Red Doane balanced the gun in his hand, cocked it with an audible click. "Nothing, damn you! But I will kill you if you do not!"

"For God, Master! He is an Italian—you know, like a man with an organ and a monkey."

Knowing that a *lepero* would betray anyone foolish enough to trust him, especially when frightened, Jimmy was inclined to believe that this fellow had told the approximate truth.

"Where are you to meet the Italian," he asked gruffly, "and when?"

"In Plaza Mayor before another hour has passed."

"Very good," said the Texan. "You may go. Tell him that I am dining at *La Noche Triste* with a beautiful woman. You do not need to follow me farther. I will be at the cafe."

The *lepero* went away from there like a ragged and filthy ghost.

Jimmy returned his gun to its shoulder holster. Grinning down at the Indian, he

said, "Now, my boy, we must go and find a beautiful woman."

Domingo nodded obediently. "In that case, Master, I have three sharp knives on my person."

Red chuckled. "A woman—knives? But women are valuable, my *mozo.* A wise man once said that a woman keeps her own secrets locked in her breast and scatters the secrets of others to the four winds. We need such a woman now."

Again the Indian bowed with proper respect for the wisdom of his master. "Senor, was it not Mictlanteuctli who said that?"

"Who was he?"

"Before the coming of the new priests," replied Zala, "he was the Aztec god of hell. He had much trouble with women. It is said that when a certain woman from my home mountains was sent there, she turned hell up-side-down and threw the old god out. My brother married one of her descendants. *She* threw my brother out."

Red was still laughing when he found another coach and climbed into it.

He overheard Domingo telling the driver in a most convincing manner, "*Hombre,* you are greatly honored to have my master riding in your filthy oxcart. He is half god and half bandit. He can do no evil thing and because it is necessary that every man do *some* evil, or have it done for him, my master keeps me always near him.

"I am a doer of evil things. But one of the good things I do is to collect the ears of *cocheros* who hear too much, the eyes of those who see forbidden things and the tongues of those who talk too much. I dry them on a long string. Do not fail to go straight to the house of Senorita Constancia Cordova as my master commanded."

From somewhere in the limited space between the driver's huge sombrero and his ragged serape there came a grunt. "I think, *mozo,* that you should be named Popocatapetl, the home of big winds and fires that are dead."

"Winds that cut to the bone and fires that smolder and smell of sulphur," retorted Domingo. "Remember that, my *cochero,* when you are thinking of signaling your *lepero* brothers to come and rob us."

NOTWITHSTANDING her sins, Constancia Cordova was acknowleged to be one of the cleverest women in Mexico. It was said that to bring out and expose to the public view the secrets locked up in her pretty head would amount to a major catastrophe, followed by financial calamities and domestic dislocations in many of society's most snooty homes. For sober men talked to Constancia and drunks bared their souls to her. She had the brains to understand what they were talking about and the good sense to listen when listening paid off and, moreover, her reputation inspired confidence that when a secret went into her dainty ears it never again saw the light of day. This reputation was made to order—by Constancia herself. She religiously kept secrets that could not be converted into hard cash or its equivalent, and when a conversion *did* take place she handled it so cleverly as to preclude the remotest possibility that she'd ever be blamed for letting the cat out of the bag.

If Constancia Cordova had a weakness it was James Mahoney Doane and he knew it.

A two-storied stone with the familiar barred windows and massive door, Constancia's house was less pretentious that some of its neighbors and one that was calculated not to attract undue attention to itself. Tonight the drapes were tightly drawn as usual, but here and there slivvers of light escaped. Though no horse or carriage was in sight near the place, Jimmy halted his coach at a street corner several doors away.

Calling Domingo down from the driver's seat, he whispered, "Can you go around

behind these other houses and find the back of the senorita's home?"

"Of a certainty, Senor," answered the Indian with childlike frankness. "That is where I always go to meet Alicia, her *moza*" (maid) "when you are inside and sometimes, too, when you are not inside."

"Good!" chuckled Red. "Go there now. Hide and watch to see whether anyone leaves when I arrive."

"Shall I use the knife on this other man if there is one, Master?"

"No, no, *muchacho!* I am not that jealous."

The Indian slipped away on silent feet, his white clothing blending into the silvery colors with which the moon was drenching the city tonight.

As a matter of fact, jealousy had nothing to do with Red Doane's action. Years of close contact with the underworld in Mexican cities and on the Texas frontier had taught him to appreciate the wisdom of something that he once heard his pioneer father say, "What you know about the other fella won't never do you no hurt if you keep yo' mouth shet and it may come in right handy, cain't tell."

Constancia Cordova was hard to handle and Jimmy figured that the more he knew about her, the better. He had an idea that if this girl took a notion she could give him plenty of help in running down the chief of *Los Asesinos,* a thing that he had no hope of doing without some such unorthodox assistance—a source of information that had not been available to Mexico's quite capable police.

When Red presently went to the door Alicia, a pretty little Indian girl, answered his knock.

She did not at once recognize him in the shadow of the recessed entrance.

"I am sorry, Senor," she began courteously, "but you have the wrong house—Oh! Senor Doane!"

Apologizing with the humility of her kind she took him into the reception room, then hurried away.

Constancia didn't keep him waiting very long and when she arrived, she came in like a brightly colored blossom blown by a high wind. No langorous movements or slow glamor. Electric was the word that fitted her. She seemed to charge the very atmosphere with it. The Texan had known her for years and now, for the hundredth time he thought that she was a living example of how a girl could substitute brains for beauty and get away with it; for although she wasn't by any means the prettiest girl in Mexico, just let a man look at her and listen to her for five minutes and he'd swear that she was the most beautiful woman in the world. Jimmy Doane himself was no exception. However, he did know that he was monkeying with gunpowder, a thing that most of her admirers never suspected and her victims learned too late.

BEFORE he could untangle his long legs and get up Constancia had kissed him twice, ruffled his wavy red hair, straightened his tie and curled up in his lap without regard for an old rose gown that had cost somebody a plenty. She spoke English like a Texan, having learned it in a San Antonio school where she also learned a lot of things about how to work American men.

"Where in hell have you been for four days?" she demanded. "Don't lie!"

He did, "Me? I been moonin' around a-wonderin' whether you'd let me carry you out and buy you a big feed tonight."

Constancia laughed. It was like the rest of her, quick, vivacious, full of deviltry. She mimicked his drawl, which he dropped into as a relief from stilted Spanish, "Oh, shore! You can carry me anywheres and buy me anything you want, Jeemie, 'cause I know that you've got a heap of money now—too much for your own good, or mine. Money draws women like honey, draws bees."

Red grinned dryly. "It ain't never got me no women. But money sure draws

knives in this man's town. Did you hear about the Hernandez killin'?"

Constancia was a patriotic Mexican girl with a high pride in her country. Her dark eyes flashed. "Terrible!" she exclaimed in Spanish. "He was one of Mexico's great men. I am glad they got the murderer, damn him!"

Evidently she was not aware of Jimmy's part in the affair.

"They got the knifer, all right," he answered, "but the boss of that assassin outfit is still a-ridin' high and a-rangin' wide."

The girl spoke up quickly in a hushed voice, "Listen, my Diego! Do you really believe that there is such a band as *Los Asesinos?*"

"Uh-huh. How come you to know about 'em?"

"Wait here!"

She slipped from his lap like an excited child and hurried into another room. Red himself felt a slight tingle of excitement. Constancia knew something—no telling what it was.

She came back in a moment, handed him an envelope and dropped to a hassock at his feet. "Alicia found that under my door this morning. Read it."

Jimmy glanced at the envelope front and back. No address. He took out a single sheet of paper, and read in Spanish:

> Srta. Constancia Cordova:
>
> You make money easily and have more than you need. You will therefore draw from your bank gold coin to the value of ten thousand pesos and be prepared to deliver it to our messenger when he arrives. Further instructions will reach you soon. Do not report this matter to the police or anyone else. If you contemplate disobedience, give thought to the fate that will befall a certain prominent man today.
>
> Los Asesinos.

Red cursed under his breath. The girl kept silent, intent upon his face. Frowning, he returned the letter to its envelope and sank into deep thought.

In paper and handwriting this note bore no resemblance to the one he had received, yet Perez had said that they were always alike. This fact ought to mean something. Jimmy would've figured that one of Constancia's victims was trying to shake her down by calling himself *Los Asesinos* if the letter had not prophesied what did happen to Hernandez. No two ways about it, the cuss who wrote this was on the inside.

Suddenly an idea popped into the Texan's red head. Maybe the boss of the assassins was a friend of Constancia's. Maybe he had, at some time or another, written to her in his fancy script on scented paper and dare not use it again. From what the general had said it would be just like the fool. And maybe this idea wasn't worth much, but Jimmy aimed to find out if he could.

"Diego!" cried the girl. "You have thought of something exciting. Tell me, quick!"

He grinned wryly. "And I've always figured that I had a pretty fair poker face."

She looked contemptuously up at him, and declared in English, "A man's poker face isn't worth a damn when he tries it on his woman. Talk!"

Jimmy laughed. "Very good," he said in Spanish. "I will ask you some questions and I want you to answer them truthfully."

"Perhaps I will."

"You often get letters from men, do you not?"

"Hundreds."

"And you keep some of them?"

"Y-e-s, those that are valuable—sentimentally, of course."

Red nodded gravely. "Of course. And you have compared this one with those you have?"

"Naturally, and learned nothing."

He now ventured cautiously onto dangerous ground. "Not wishing to pry into

your personal affairs, my Constancia—but you have been quarreling with some man, have you not?"

Her jaw set stubbornly. "That is none of your business, Don Diego Doane," she said slowly. "I would like to know what you have on your mind, but I will not let you cross-question me."

Jimmy had anticipated something of this description. It was a part of her act. He laughed quietly, got up and held out a hand to her. "Come on, you little Mexican wildcat. Let's us go and eat before you get me mad and I spoil your appetite."

Her face thawed instantly. She pressed his hand with both of hers, and spoke his language, "Won't you please tell me what you were thinking about, Jeemie?"

"Nope, and you dassn't cross-question me," he replied dryly. "But I *will* tell you that this *Asesino* business ain't no joke and you better get shed of the idea that you're slick enough to handle 'em all by yourself like you do other men. If you'll come down off'n your high horse and pull in double harness with me, maybe we can plow 'em under. If you don't, I betcha they clip your claws clean down to the quick. Now, let's go. I'm hungry and when I'm hungry, I'm bad."

The girl's chin went up a trifle. She dropped his hand, left him standing there. Her heels clicked sharply on the tiles. At the door, she flung back, "I always did say that long-legged red-headed men are the cussedest of all men!"

They revived the quarrel when she returned in evening wraps and regardless of the fact that Jimmy thought she was about the prettiest thing he had ever seen under a *mantilla* and high tortoise-shell comb, they fought off and on all the way to the cafe, a distance of two miles or more. There he asked her to remain in the coach while he took Domingo aside and spoke privately with him.

Without prompting, the Indian began, "This man is very tall, but not so tall as you, and very handsome, but not so handsome as you, Master. His mustache and hair are black and his skin is pale and there is not much meat on his bones. He walks like a cat and I think he carries knives. He had tied his horse behind the house. It is white and worth stealing."

Domingo paused, slipped a hand into his blouse and looked past Jimmy at a pair of thieves who were edging closer behind the well-dressed American's back. They caught his eye and retreated in some haste.

"This man was cursing in three languages, Senor," continued the Indian, "one of which was Spanish."

"You have done well," said Doane. "Stand where you can look inside. I expect trouble before we leave here."

Cafe *La Noche Triste* (The Sorrowful Night) was a moderately respectable place operated by a moderately honest man and patronized by people with money, respectable and otherwise. No high-class Mexican would think of taking his wife or sweetheart to it, though he wouldn't hesitate to go there with—or to meet another woman, or alone to dine if he were hungry for fine food and had the cash to pay for it. The oldest citizen would swear that the cafe had always been there and it looked the part. Its stone walls were four feet thick, its ceiling beams were tree trunks that had the aged look of petrified wood, and its rough and ancient flagstone floor suggested that in its day it had known the heavy tread of men in armor. The man who gave the place its name had either a sardonic sense of humor under his skin, or a Conquistador on his family tree. For *La Noche Triste* was what the marauding Spaniards called that bloody night of July 1, 1520, when they were all but wiped out by the justly enraged Aztecs whose hospitality they had betrayed.

DON DIEGO DOANE and Senorita Constancia Cordova were well and favorably known patrons of the old cafe. They had no more than crossed its threshold before the proprietor, Senor Mateo

Salomon Medina, welcomed them with a grand bow in correct evening garb except that, in lieu of a vest, a flaming red sash encircled his heroic middle. Jimmy had once caught him in some crooked work and threatened to shoot a hole in him, whereupon they had arrived at a mutual understanding and become the best of friends. The names of the newcomers were whispered at many tables, too, by men who envied Red because of his lovely companion and by women who could have strangled Constancia for a variety of reasons known only to themselves, perhaps—principally envy, no doubt.

Medina conducted them to Red's favorite table in a corner where he had four feet of rock and cement at his back and could keep an eye on both front and side doors. A waiter and his assistant hovered around, but the proprietor personally took the order.

At its conclusion, he asked, "The usual wines, Don Doane?"

"Yes," answered Jimmy, "and in addition, Sal, I want you to dust off one of those bottles which your father looted from a French ship while he was a pirate and willed to you for your own use. We are celebrating an occasion."

Salomon expanded to the bursting point, bowed again and rolled his eyes at each of them. "Ahhh! I understand! May I felicitate the bride and bridegroom?"

Jimmy's face took on the approximate color of his hair. "Thank you, my friend," he blurted, "but we are not married—"

"Yet," interposed Constancia.

She frowned at him, and added, "I *hate* Don Diego Doane, hence I shall perhaps marry the man."

Salomon turned and left, holding onto his laughter.

"And I'll wring your pretty neck if you do," growled Red in English, " 'cause I ain't the marryin' kind and—"

The sentence hung in the air. He fixed his attention upon a man that was coming through the side entrance, a burly fellow who might very well be an Italian and answered the *lepero's* description of the stranger who had hired him. The big man brushed a couple of waiters aside. He lumbered across the room to a table in the region of Jimmy's and sat down with no more than a casual glance at the American.

Lowering his voice, Red continued, "As I was fixin' to say, I won't be at all surprised if I have to shoot a man before long. You're right smack in the way. When the waiter comes back have him move you to the other side of the table."

The girl didn't get flustered, didn't even look around. She laughed softly. Placing a hand on his, she whispered, "I always have fun with you, Jeemie Doane. Wherever you go things happen. Why must you shoot the man?"

The Texan wasn't ready to tell her about his letter from *Los Asesinos*. He drawled, " 'Cause my hide ain't tough enough to turn a knife or stop a bullet."

Constancia asked no more questions. Instead, she switched the conversation to this and that and kept up a sparkling chatter in Spanish until the waiter arrived with an appetizer.

"Why does that Medina hide me behind a post when I come here?" she demanded loud enough to be heard at the Italian's table. "I want to sit over there."

The change was quickly made.

As Red sat down again, he asked in a whisper, "Did you ever see that big fella before?"

The girl shook her head. She started to say something, stopped suddenly and looked sharply at the front entrance. A tall, black-haired man and a striking brunette were at the moment passing under the massive arch. They carried themselves like a king and queen entering their throne room.

Domingo appeared for an instant immediately behind the man, caught Jimmy's eye, then vanished. Red loved that Indian then!

Medina bowed the newcomers to a table in the center of the room. Though they were not far away, Jimmy detected no sign of recognition or even interest when the man glanced at his table and the Italian's.

Constancia switched her attention from the stranger and his companion so quickly as to have deceived anyone other than a suspicious person like Red Doane.

He now asked her, "Who's the duke and dukess?"

She pretended suprise. "How should I know?"

"Hard to tell *how,* but you do," he drawled.

"He isn't a duke," she replied in frosty English. "He says he's an Italian count and he dines here nearly every evening."

"That's his wife?"

"No! That's a woman!"

"Mmmm-huh," mused Red aloud, "and you been fightin' with him about her. Don't blame you. She's powerful pretty."

He braced himself for the explosion.

Constancia fooled him. She merely clamped her almost perfect lips and dropped her eyes to his wine glass as if she'd love to dose it with strychnine.

Red sprinkled a little gunpowder on the fire. "How do I know that you had a ruckus with him?" he asked lazily. "Plumb simple. Whenever ary fella goes out of your back door a-swearin' to beat hell, I'll gamble that you ain't been makin' love to the pore cuss." He paused, sipped his wine. "Your count rides a white horse."

She exploded then, burst into Spanish that fairly sizzled. "You and that damned Indian of yours!"

During the next thirty seconds Jimmy Doane heard things about himself that he had never heard before. But he didn't mind. Although he knew nothing about psychology as such, he *did* know how to undermine the self-assurance of a cocky person and he realized that this tirade was the noisy collapse of Constancia's confidence in her ability to pull the wool over his eyes *all* the time. She spoke in a half whisper and stopped when short of breath rather than words.

"That Indian is a devil and you are the devil's master!" she hissed in conclusion. "Take me home, now!"

Jimmy grinned, shook his head. "Nope. We got business here, both of us."

He took the *Asesino* letter from an inside pocket. Holding it under the edge of the table, he showed her the address on the envelope. "Ain't that mighty pretty writin'?"

She fired an angry glance at the letter. Her eyes narrowed, she bit her lip.

"Where did you get that?" demanded the girl with her gaze still fastened on the envelope.

"Here, read it and I'll tell you. Keep the thing out of sight."

Constancia's eyes raced through the letter. Her small face hardened as she read. Afterwards, she leaned back in her chair and stared straight ahead at the bare wall for a moment. Her fingers twisted the paper into a small tight roll.

Presently, she murmured, "And this is how he got the money that he spent on me."

"Who?"

"The Count Luigi Gretano, the man over there."

Jimmy Doane's heart beat a little faster. His long lean face was deadly serious now.

"My little friend," he said in Spanish, "you are not to blame for the way in which he got the money. You should be happy rather than otherwise for I am almost cer-

tain that you have identified the chief of *Los Asesinos,* a thing that the police have been trying to do for three years. You have received letters from him on this perfumed paper?"

"Yes," she snapped, "and kept them!"

"Good!" grimly declared Red. "But it will take more than that to convict him and it is going to be no easy thing for you and me to stay alive long enough to get this evidence. Yonder comes our waiter. I have a feeling that this man over here has been looking for a chance to catch me off guard and he may try something while we are being served. If he does, watch the count for me, will you? I want to see how he takes it."

"Takes what?"

The Texan's face was as hard as flint. "The thing that I shall cause to happen."

Constancia Cordova herself looked every inch a fighter. "I will watch him! If you have two pistols, give me one."

Jimmy smiled at her and shook his head as the waiters arrived.

Seated at the American's left, perhaps ten feet distant, the big Italian took a small parcel from his pocket and went to fumbling with the rubber band that wrapped it. Red couldn't imagine what the fellow was up to. That pill-box didn't look dangerous. In the meantime Constancia was complaining to the waiter about something in a normal voice and his assistant was on the far side of the table, almost in line between Jimmy and the Italian, rearranging candles and placing glasses and silver.

Presently the rubber band got away from the big man and snapped three-quarters of the distance to Doane's table. Red got the idea instantly. While pretending to take an inventory of the wine glasses of various sizes and shapes that were now lined up before him, he slid a hand under his coat and laid hold of his six-shooter. The Italian looked around as if in search of his own waiter. His glance touched the Texan briefly. Afterwards, he got up and lumbered over to get the rubber, stooped and reached for it with his left hand. With his right he jerked a gun from the waistband of his trousers!

Red's six-shooter exploded in his face. The blast of the forty-five and the shock of its heavy bullet in his shoulder flung him backward to the floor. Momentarily paralyzed, no doubt, he dropped his gun and lay there. Red Doane towered over him in the smoke.

Instantly the place was in an uproar. High-strung Latins sprang from their seats overturning chairs and tables, some dashing for exits, others running to the scene of combat regardless of danger. Knives and guns appeared. Domingo bored through and under the packed crowd like a mole. He halted behind Jimmy, facing the spectators with a knife in his steely brown hand. Count Luigi Gretano sat still. So also did Constancia Cordova.

After the first rush came a moment of comparative silence. Red was quick to seize this opportunity.

He spoke up calmly, loud enough to be heard by everyone, "It is nothing, my friends. There will be no more trouble. This unfortunate gentleman and I were discussing an old feud. It has come to an end."

The word "discussing" appealed to their sense of humor. A murmur rippled through the crowd, followed by somewhat nervous laughter. After all, the wounded man was a stranger and an Italian and Jiimmy was Don Diego Doane, an *Americano*—certainly, but one who had proved his love for Mexico and Mexicans and, through his exploits, he had become a romantic figure in the mind of a people with an appetite for romance. They drifted back to their tables talking about him and the things he had done.

One policeman arrived quickly and others came with an ambulance shortly thereafter. Red went to the door with them and the prisoner. He whispered the words *Los Asesinos* to the sergeant in

charge. That intelligent officer promptly clamped handcuffs on the Italian, notwithstanding his wound.

On the way back to his table Jimmy felt the hard stare of Luigi Gretano's steady eyes, an uncomfortable sensation.

Constancia's piquant face was now in a state of fiery animation, prettier than ever. She caught Red's hand when he sat down, and whispered breathlessly, "Diego, mine! It was dreadfully thrilling! You were so cold, so savage, so terrible, *so* handsome!"

"So dumb, you mean," he said grimly. "I let that killer get within arm's reach and he might have blocked my draw. How did your count behave?"

"He looked bored."

"Huh! A clever fool, as the chief said."

Jimmy emptied his wine glass. "I presume," he told the girl, "that this business has killed your appetite."

"On the contrary, I am starving—literally."

He grinned proudly at her and called the waiter.

WHILE taking a little smoke after the fourth course, Red ventured to bring up the subject of the quarrel again. "I think you should tell me about it," he suggested in conclusion. "It may be useful."

Constancia was agreeable now. "There is not much to tell. He wanted me to live in his villa at San Angel. I refused. He then wanted me to marry him. I refused. He demanded that I give up all other men. I refused. He returned this evening to persuade me. I refused to be persuaded. Then you came and I told him to go. *He* refused. I told him that I would have you shoot him into little pieces. He knows who you are. He went. That is all."

"That's a-plenty," drawled Jimmy in English. In Spanish, he asked, "Does he have a house in the city?"

"No. He keeps a horse at a public stable and often stays the night at a hotel or elsewhere in town."

The red-headed Texan devoted the next minute to deep thought, frowning at a daring idea that wouldn't stay out of his mind. Constancia kept still and watched him do it, keeping still being one of her accomplishments that appealed to men.

Presently, in a way that didn't encourage argument, he told her, "You are in grave danger. I shall tonight ask General Perez to station a reliable detective in your house and keep him there until this thing is finished."

She arched her brows, and remarked tartly, "You should have said that I will get one if I want one. A detective in my house is the most dangerous thing I can imagine."

Red was still thinking hard. He frowned, continued, "And you will hide this officer tomorrow night when the count comes to see you, but hide him where he can protect you."

Constancia gasped, her breath making one of those strange little sounds that cats make. "That man will never see the inside of my house again!"

Jimmy resumed somewhat absently as if he were talking to himself and her at the same time, "Yes, he will come when you send him a note saying that you are expecting him not later than nine o'clock in the evening."

"I will not!"

"Of course you will invent some good excuse for inviting the count," continued Red as if she hadn't spoken. "You are a skilled inventor. During the conversation please let him know in a casual way that you still have his letters. He will try to get them and I want the detective to overhear what he says. But that is merely incidental. I want to make certain that he is away from home tomorrow evening."

Jimmy hobbled her objections with a smile, and, "Constancia, sweetheart! Please, now! You are too smart to act like a stubborn little fool."

"I *will* be a fool. I shall do what you ask!"

Before daylight the next morning Jimmy Doane went for a ride. Mounted on a

tall sorrel which he kept in the hotel stables and accompanied by Domingo on a Spanish pony he set out on the Grand Paseo toward the castle and park of Chapultepec, a favorite ride or drive for Mexican society. Starting early and secretly that way he hoped to avoid spies.

Red went beyond Chapultepec to the beautiful little suburb of San Angel where the annual flower fiesta was held, a place noted for its fine orchards, lovely flower gardens and wicked past. A few years back it was one of the wildest gambling spots in the country. Jimmy Doane now grinned to himself at the familiar scenery, for he remembered the time when he had gone broke *piking* monte in Monterrey, borrowed a stake, come to San Angel and forthwith won a small fortune *dealing* monte with the same trickery that had busted him. He was, therefore, no stranger to the town and readily found the address that Constancia had given him.

It was an unpretentious villa of brown stone, one story in height, U-shaped, the two wings connected at the rear by a high ornamental iron fence. Halted on a sharp rise behind it the horsemen could look down into its patio, for the sun was now crawling up the far side of the mountains that formed the rugged horizon. Red told Domingo to get a clear picture of the place in his head.

"The Count Luigi Gretano lives there," he added. "Do you think we can get into it by moonlight?"

"Of a certainty, Senor. You can get into or out of any place."

"Then we will rob that house tonight."

"Yes, Master. It will be well robbed."

ON THEIR way back to the city a while later Jimmy and Domingo were walking their horses along the bridle path that divided the Grand Paseo into two paved thoroughfares, a short distance beyond Chapultepec, when they met a closed carriage. It passed on their left. Doane saw two men inside, but paid no particular attention to the rig until he noticed that the Indian was riding in one stirrup and looking back frequently. He, too, glanced over his shoulder. The coach had turned around and was approaching at a lively gait. When two hundred yards or so away it slowed to a pace that held that distance. Red lifted his sorrel into a high trot, whereupon the *cochero* plied his whip.

"They are following us, Senor," declared Zala. "I have been watching them because I did not like the looks of those men."

"Were they Italians?"

"No, Senor. Bad Mexicans."

"Spies for *Los Asesinos,*" muttered Red thoughtfully. "We got away from them by starting out so early, but they probably learned at the stable that we had gone riding and somehow traced us in this direction. They do not know where we have

been, of course, but they will tell where they found us and the count may guess that we were in San Angel. He is infernally clever. Damn the luck! When we are certain that they *are* following us we will have to do something about it."

Domingo looked eagerly up into Red's hard face. "I am carrying two knives and one pistol this morning," he said. "Shall I ambush them, Master? There is a good place not far ahead. Afterwards, we can take their bodies to the police and you can swear that they attacked us."

"That is a good plan, my *mozo,*" replied Jimmy, "but we will take them alive if possible. They might talk—if not to us, to someone else."

Red was thankful that the mounted officers who patroled the Grand Paseo were not yet out in full force and luckily none were near the side road which the Indian presently suggested that they take. It was a quiet drive which curved behind a knoll and into some trees. The riders dismounted and tied their horses. A few moments later there came the rattle of harness and the sound of hoofs on the hard-surfaced road.

"Ain't no doubt about it now," growled Red in English. In Spanish, he said, "You stop the team and guard the driver."

Pretty soon things happened fast and with little noise. The carriage, a public vehicle, rounded the turn with the driver flourishing his whip over a pair of sorry bays. Domingo sprang out and seized a bridle with one hand, leveled a pistol with his other. The *cochero* dropped his lines and put up his hands, too scared to make a sound.

Meanwhile, Red leaped to the door of the coach. Neither of the passengers recovered from his surprise in time to draw a weapon before the Texan's six-shooter looked him in the eye from a dangerously short range.

"If you make a move or a sound I will shoot you with great pleasure," declared Red in a quiet way that carried conviction. "I hate spies!"

The two Mexicans sat perfectly still. He looked them over. They were not *leperos*. They belonged to a class of crooks that moved in a higher stratum of underworld society, frequented the city's toughest dives and would commit any crime for a price.

"Get out!" he told them. "No, no, *hombre!* On *this* side and come out with your hands in the air."

They obeyed sullenly, watchfully. Red kept them covered, backed away to a safe distance, for he realized that should he give these cutthroats half a chance they'd jump him.

"Cochero!" he barked. "You come down here."

The frightened Mexican wasted no time in doing so, whereupon Jimmy told Domingo to search and disarm the three men. The driver had a knife. Each of the crooks carried a revolver and a knife and one also had a brass knucks with spiked knuckles, a murderous thing. At Red's command the Indian bound the thugs' hands with their own silk sashes. Afterwards he ordered them into the carriage, onto its front seat facing the rear. He took the back seat and told the driver to get up there and drive as if nothing had happened.

"To Police Headquarters," he added, "and be certain that you look straight ahead every foot of the way."

Domingo followed on his pony, leading the sorrel.

Red kept an eye on the prisoners while giving his instructions. They looked murder at him, but, when he mentioned the police fear flashed briefly in their vicious faces. He knew that such men nearly always had records and surmised that even now the law might be looking for one or both of these rascals.

As the coach rattled away he grinned at each of them in turn, and remarked dryly, "It is not absolutely necessary that I deliver you to the police. As you perhaps know, I myself am never on the best of terms with the law."

Jimmy paused, balanced his six-shooter in the palm of his hand, waited. Neither man has a word to say.

'For example," he continued, "I want very much to learn who hired you to follow me and kill me if you got a good chance. I could be persuaded to do you a favor if you told me what I want to know."

"You would lie to us," snarled one of the thugs, a burly fellow.

Red nodded imperturbably, "Yes, and you to me. How would you suggest that two liars protect themselves against the lies of a third, and vice versa?"

It was the other crook who answered the question, a small man bearing some

resemblance to a rat with brains. "You should give us our weapons and turn us loose, Don Diego Doane," he declared brazenly. "You dare not believe anything we tell you and it will do you no good to turn us over to the police."

"Perhaps not," admitted Jimmy, "and neither will I gain anything by releasing you."

He frowned at them, and snapped, "That bandit Tito Balli hired you to assassinate me! Is it not true?"

It so happened that Tito was a well known bandit and a very good friend of Red's. At the moment he was in Brownsville.

THE big thug looked perfectly blank. The little man spoke up after a scarcely noticeable hesitation, "If we tell you the truth will you take our word and let us go?"

Jimmy pursed his lips thoughtfully, cocked and uncocked his six-shooter. "We-l-l, there is the matter of my revenge."

Senor Rat smiled scornfully. "A bandit chief so big and rich as you, Don Doane, does not stoop to revenge upon poor men like us."

Red stared hard at him for a moment. "Very good. Answer my question. I will judge whether you are telling the truth."

The little man's sharp face plainly tried to look honest and made a fizzle of it. "Yes, Senor," he replied, "Balli has offered five hundred pesos for your death. We need the money, my friend and I."

"And I need to live until I meet that Balli again," growled Red. "I believe you. Remain in the carriage for ten minutes after I have gone. We will leave your weapons in the trees where we caught you."

He ordered a halt and told the driver to release his passengers at the prescribed time, adding, "Here is a *medio* to pay you for my ride, *cochero*. Your carriage is beautiful and its cushions soft. Good-by, boys."

Of course, Domingo neither protested nor asked a single question when Jimmy told him to drop the thugs' weapons in the trees, but a mystified frown wrinkled his usually inscrutable brow.

As they rode away toward the avenue, Jimmy grinned at him, and asked, "Is it that you do not quite understand, my *mozo?*"

The Indian's face cleared instantly. "Master, you should punish me for daring to think. I know that anything you do is good, although I may not be smart enough to see the wisdom of it."

"No, no, *muchacho!* I want you to think."

He went on to explain how their grave danger was the possibility that Luigi Gretano might, after last evening, surmise that they suspected him to be chief of *Los Asesinos* and forthwith make his escape. Red hoped that the two crooks would report what he had said regarding Tito Balli and boast about how they had made a fool of him. After hearing this the count naturally would reason that Doane didn't know so much.

AROUND eight o'clock that evening Jimmy and Domingo walked to the government palace on Plaza Mayor and wandered through the maze of rooms and corridors that honeycombed the 2800-foot building in an effort to lose anyone who might be shadowing them. Eventually they emerged beneath a portico where General Perez' private carriage was waiting as prearranged. With curtains down, the closed rig was soon on its way to San Angel. Inside, Red Doane changed to white cotton blouse and trousers, canvas shoes with fiber soles, a straw sombrero and he coiled a short length of rope around his waist. He covered his head, face and neck with a mask fashioned from a white stocking, and Domingo did likewise.

They drove completely around Gretano's

villa, which stood alone in its block, and halted on a deserted and uninhabited street behind it where the coach was partially hidden by an ancient wall densely covered by bourgainvillea vines. The house was dark save for a single window in the right or east wing. Crouched in the shadow of the wall where he had a clear view of the patio, Jimmy concluded that the light came from the servants' quarters since it obviously adjoined the stable in the rear part of that wing. It sure looked as if Constancia had baited the count away from home, all right.

Red wasted no time in speculation upon what might lie in wait for them inside. Followed by the Indian he ran through bright moonlight to the back of the east wing, slipped along the wall to the iron fence which completed the patio enclosure and tossed a loop of his rope over one of the ornamental spearheads that topped it. They cleared the fence in a jiffy, dropped into the patio without a sound, left the rope hanging there just in case.

On their right the stable doors stood open. The carriage space was vacant and each of the five stalls empty, but a quick inspection showed that they had been occupied quite recently. Jimmy frowned at the thought that three riders might have accompanied the count and his coach.

He left the stable and moved silently over the flagstones beneath the patio porch to the lighted room. Its inside window was open, door ajar and men's low voices were audible. Avoiding the light Red stole to the window and looked in. Two men were drinking wine and playing cards at a small table, one a huge fat fellow—probably a cook, the other slender and wiry and shifty—a *mozo* or houseman, more than likely. Jimmy couldn't understand what they were saying, other than such Italian words as happened closely to resemble Spanish.

Nodding for Domingo to follow, he stooped and passed under the window to the door. He gave it a shove that slammed it back against the wall and strode into the light, a tall ghostly figure in white from head to foot. Red leveled his six-shooter at the small man—the most dangerous of the two, he thought. Zala slithered through the door with his knife. Not a word was spoken.

The slender man froze with a deck of cards in his hands, his chin sagging. But the fat man did the unexpected. When the door banged open he was in the act of filling his glass. Without an instant's hesitation he threw the heavy wine bottle. A short snap of his big hand sent it whirling with terrific force. It caught Red on the point of his right shoulder. He staggered back. His arm went dead temporarily. He dropped his gun!

Domingo leaped at the small man in the nick of time, for he had now jerked a pistol. The Indian's knife buried an inch in the side of his neck before he could fire. He sucked in his breath, let the gun go and sat very still.

Meanwhile, the fat man handled his bulk with the ease and speed of a bear. He literally hurled himself after the bottle. Red took a quick step forward, launched a vicious jab with his left. His fist drove home to the big fellow's face. It set him back on his heels. In a twinkling, however, he snatched up the neck of the broken bottle and lunged at the Texan again. Jimmy sidestepped toward where his gun lay, slipped in the wine on the smooth tiles and fell. For a fleeting instant he looked up at the jagged glass in the Italian's hairy fist. His flesh crawled. A yard away from his useless right hand lay his six-shooter. He spun over like a snake and seized it with his left. That move saved his life. A blow that would have ripped him from waist to breastbone merely slit the back of his blouse. The big man was bending over him, momentarily off balance. He drove the muzzle of his gun into the fellow's fat throat with all of his strength. The cook lurched away, gasping. Jimmy rolled clear.

On his feet again, Red quietly told the Italian in Spanish, "Sit down! I will not hurt you if you behave. I do not blame you for defending your employer's property. Sit—down!"

Working fast they tied the prisoners' hands, found a bunch of keys on the houseman and opened the gate in the iron fence. While Jimmy rubbed life back into his arm, Domingo marched the Italians out to the far side of the vine-covered wall near the carriage and left them in charge of the driver, one of the police chief's reliable men.

Although Red hoped that Constancia would delay Gretano long enough for him to finish the job here he couldn't afford to gamble too strong on that, since he had no way of knowing how early the count had left or how soon he might return. Accordingly, he stationed the Indian in the shadow of a shrub in the front yard where he could watch approaches to the place and went to work in a hurry.

With the aid of a candle Jimmy made a quick trip through the house to get its layout, then started a methodical search. No closet, cupboard or storeroom was neglected, since he had keys to all of them. Besides the master's suite of two which adjoined the large main room along the front, there were five bedrooms. Baggage in three of these indicated that they were occupied by guests. Armed with makeshift tools from the pantry and kitchen he attacked the guests' luggage and soon had the positive knowledge that one Antonio Capri had recently come from Monterrey, Pietro Bernardini from Chihuahua and Raimondo Verdi from Durango. Red figured that these were key men who, perhaps, employed the actual murderers and were themselves shifted around by Gretano to prevent identification.

So far, so good, grimly reflected the Texan, but he hadn't found a scrap of evidence against the boss murderer, and time was slipping by mighty fast.

His long face set hard beneath his mask when he entered the count's study. Like a hound on a warm trail he scented the perfume with which the *Los Asesinos* letters were identified and it spurred his brain to sharper and faster thinking. He made a quick preliminary examination of the elaborately furnished den and its connecting bedroom. Neither here nor elsewhere in the house was there anything resembling a safe or strong box and it therefore followed that Gretano must have a secret hiding place for his private papers, perhaps records of his shady transactions such as crooks sometimes kept. As he held the candle above his head, Jimmy Doane's eyes prowled around the study frowning at everything they saw, particularly a desk in a far corner of the room. It was a massive thing of ornately carved mahogany and very old, not unlike one that he had seen in San Antonio—imported from Spain and formerly used by a Spanish governor of Texas. He remembered something about that old desk and got busy on this one.

Fighting for patience when he knew that he had no time to waste, Jimmy Doane began a minute examination of the highly polished surface in the hope of discovering some unexpected point that had been worn by handling during its long period of use. Inch by inch he went over it, cursing the flowery designs in which it was carved and damning the artisans of another day who fashioned joints that were all but invisible. He fought down an urge to pull and jerk though aware that force wouldn't locate the secret drawer or cabinet if, in fact, one existed. As time wore on, sweat broke out all over him. He misinterpreted night sounds that found their way into the house and twice stopped to listen, thinking that he heard riders approaching.

Then suddenly, right before his eyes where it had been all the time, he discovered the very thing he was looking for. The narrow edge of a pigeon-hole parti-

tion showed signs of wear for no apparent reason. He pressed it. The partition moved inward easily. He took hold of another and pulled. The upper three-fourths of the bank of pigeon-holes came out smoothly, exposing a false compartment in the rear!

Red Doane heaved a sigh, wiped sweat from his face. He quickly removed the contents of the secret cabinet, a few thin packages of letters and papers neatly bound with colored tape and a daybook or journal. Eagerly he opened the book. After briefly thumbing its pages he saw that it was a directory, written in the beautiful scrip of the *Los Asesinos* letters, containing the names and intimate data regarding many of the richest men in Mexico and their families, ranging all the way from hemp growers in Yucatan to the great mine owners and *hacienderos* elsewhere in the nation. An ambitious extortionist, this Luigi Gretano, sardonically reflected the Texan.

Evidently it was the count's plan to extend his operations into every corner of the country where big money was to be found and another section of the book showed that he had already made some progress in that direction. Here each name was given a page and beneath it were entries recording dates and amounts of payments. The police chief was right, thought Jimmy. A good many persons in different parts of the nation were being systematically bled by this Italian leech. Without taking time to total the entries Red could see that they would amount to a staggering sum.

In running through the book he found a number of names that had been stricken out with red ink. Some had made payments, others had not. The dreadful significance of the crimson lines became apparent when they ruled out the name of Doctor Agustin de Hernandez. Assassinations! Doane hastily summarized them: six in Mexico City, two in Monterrey, one in Durango, two in Chihuahua and one in Merida—twelve in all. The tool of *Los Asesinos!*

RED laid the book down and closed the hidden compartment. For fully thirty seconds he sat at Gretano's desk buried in thought, his long fingers beating a silent tattoo upon Gretano's personally compiled record of his crimes. Presently he got up and took off his mask, shoved it into his pocket. Wouldn't need to wear the thing any longer, now. He picked up a newspaper. Its scare headlines announced the murder of Doctor Hernandez. He wrapped the book and letters in it and tied the package with a piece of Gretano's blue tape. Calling Domingo, he led the way quickly out to the carriage. They took their rope along.

The driver was seated on his heels facing the prisoners, holding a six-shooter as if he knew how to use it.

Jimmy gave him the package. "Guard this as you would your life and take it to General Perez. We will put these Italians into your carriage and bind their legs. Take them to him, also. Every policeman knows you, I assume. Pick up the first one you meet to act as guard. Drive like the devil. Give the general my compliments and say that I hope he will send a squad of officers to this place with all possible speed. My *mozo* and I will wait here."

"Alone, Senor?" exclaimed the *cochero.*

"No, my friend," dryly answered Red. "Since there are two of us, neither is alone."

Jimmy didn't overlook the probability that Gretano would return before the po-

lice got there. Should his carriage drive up and call for a servant to let it in, that would be bad. He therefore opened the gate wide and made certain that the stable doors were open, gambling that the count would merely blame his men for carelessness and not get suspicious. Also, they swept up the broken glass in the servants' quarters and blew out the light. Afterwards, they went to a small reception room between the dining and living rooms from which they could watch the street and settled down to wait.

"Draw the curtains and open the window," Red told Domingo, "and we will smoke."

The Indian obeyed. Moonlight poured down upon him. He had removed his sombrero and mask and coarse black hair hung straight to the middle of his forehead and below his ears. At the point of turning away he stopped, stood perfectly still like a brown stone image clothed in white, gazing at the sky. Light glistened on the surface of his eyeballs. Breath hissed softly through his teeth.

"Master!" he whispered. "Come and see!"

He thrust out an arm and pointed. His finger trembled slightly.

Jimmy saw a strange cloud shape, black, flecked with white, a sort of nightmarish monster on its knees holding something from which feathery wisps of vapor writhed slowly upward over the face of the moon.

Always respectful of his *mozo's* superstitions, he asked seriously, "I see it and it is not pleasant to look at. What is that thing, *muchacho?*"

The Indian relaxed. His arm dropped to his side. In a voice subdued by awe, he answered, "That, Senor, is Teoyaomiqui, the old goddess of death. My grandfather knew her well."

Doane returned to his chair and sat in the light from the window. "Sit down and smoke and tell me about her."

Cross-legged on a rug at Jimmy's feet with smoke curling up before his wooden face, Dimingo Zala had the look of a Mexican incense burner come to life. His voice was low, soft and flowed monotonously. Somehow it left the dead silence of the house unbroken.

"That Teoyaomiqui is a great and terrible goddess," he began with childish sincerity. "She has many eyes, those white spots are her eyes; and many hands, some with claws like a panther's, and she has feet with tiger claws and tusks like the wild pig's, and she has no ears. Did you see that smoke, Senor?"

Jimmy nodded soberly.

"Teoyaomiqui breathes only smoke," continued the Indian. "Without it she would die. It must always be smoke from the burning hearts of men and women. She likes best smoke from the hearts of maidens. Before the Spaniards came two such hearts were kept burning on her altar night and day. The old priests never allowed those fires to go out. When new hearts were needed they made human sacrifices. Then the Conquistadors came and destroyed her altar and buried her deep in the ground."

"Did she not die?"

"No, Senor. The chief of the gods, Tezcatlipoca, loved Teoyaomiqui because she was so terrible. He saved her. He took the goddess out of the ground and placed her in the sky. He set on fire the hearts of two beautiful maidens that would burn forever and gave them to her. Did you not see her holding those hearts before her tonight, Master?"

Again Jimmy nodded.

"Now this goddess of death roams the skies and whenever her shadow falls upon any person, that man or woman will die very soon."

The Indian inhaled deeply. In a moment smoke dribbled from his nose and lips, his words fell slowly and without inflection again, "Such is the story of the goddess of death as my grandfather told it to me. I have seen her a few times, but

her shadow has not yet touched me."

"I hope that it never does, my *mozo,*" said Jimmy fervently.

Domingo's mythology always stirred his imagination and tonight he was especially susceptible to its somber influence. From where he sat he could see that thing in the sky. It was easy now for him to visualize the Indian's monstrous deity as a very real and terrible creature casting a shadow of death. Red wanted to move out of the moonlight, was ashamed to do it. He shrugged his shoulders, and hope to hell that something happened pretty soon.

At length the distant sounds of a vehicle and horses came through the open window. Jimmy Doane didn't know how long they had been waiting there, but he did know that it was too soon to expect the police.

Domingo pinched out the coal of his cigarette. "They come, Master. I am glad."

"It may not be those whom we expect. But why are you glad?"

The Indian got up and went to the window. "Being a man of small intelligence it is easy for me to sit and wait, Senor, but for you it is hard. So I am glad."

Red joined him at the window. "Remember, *muchacho,* we will remain hidden and hope that the police come in time. But, should this Count Gretano learn that he has been robbed of a certain book he will try to escape at once. We must not let him or any of his men get away, so we may be forced to fight against odds. They are professional killers. Knowing this, are you still glad?"

Domingo answered simply, "Yes, Master, but I wish that you would let me do all the fighting."

"Huh! You always do more than your share."

In this sparsely settled section of the quiet suburb the street was deserted and lay like a ribbon of silver with scattered dwellings slumbering upon either side. The moon was brighter than ever now. Smoke from Teoyaomiqui's grisly fire no longer got in his face, because, while creeping closer to him she had moved the fire aside and turned her back to the watchers in the window below. At least, such was Domingo's whispered explanation of her change in form.

The carriage soon rolled into view, escorted by three riders.

Red Doane muttered an oath. "Close the window. It is high and deep enough for us to stand in with the curtains drawn. Presently we will hide here."

Having closed the sash the Indian went to pull the drapes together. He stopped, exclaimed! "Master! The shadow! Look!"

Teoyaomiqui had taken flight before a high-altitude gale. Her misshapen head was slithering across the moon. The shadow of death flitted swiftly over the sleeping town. In passing it touched the carriage and its escort.

"We have escaped it, Master," breathed the Indian through his teeth, "but yonder are men who will die!"

"Maybeso," mused Red in English.

Watching between the curtains at the reception room's patio window he saw the carriage come through the open gate and stop. The horsemen followed closely.

"Bertrando!" yelled the driver, then, "Giovanni!"

Luigi Gretano's tall figure emerged from the coach. The door slammed behind him. He waited while two of the men went to the servants' quarters. A light sprang up in there. They came back in a few moments. A lot of rapid-fire talk in Italian ensued. At length the count shrugged his shoulders and turned to the carriage. He jerked the door open, apparently spoke to someone inside. A woman came out, all but hidden by a long cape with an attached hood. She lifted her face to speak to him.

Constancia Cordova!

"Now what the hell!" growled Jimmy under his breath.

Gretano took the girl's arm and led her through the patio to the main room.

Red and Domingo hurried to the window and got behind its curtains. The two rooms were connected by an arch hung with portieres and they could hear everything that was said in there. The Italian was talking Spanish when he opened the door, cursing drunken servants in general and his own in particular. He lighted a lamp.

"Sit down," he said curtly. "Enrico will bring us wine when he has cared for his horses. As I have warned you, my Constancia, I shall keep you locked in my cellar which is black and damp and harbors rats, but I do not intend to starve you."

"So does this house harbor rats," sweetly retorted the girl, "but I am not afraid of rats. Go and get the wine yourself, Luigi. I am thirsty. Bring champagne. I want the best you have, too."

The count swore dryly and said he'd do it. Leaving, he remarked, "All outside doors and windows are locked or barred, my dear."

Jimmy Doane had to admit that he was relieved to learn that Constancia had not come here of her own free will. He grinned to himself at what she said. Nervy woman, that hard little devil. He gave a moment's thought to the idea of slipping out while Gretano was gone and letting her know that he was here, just to ease her mind. But that would be a foolish risk; and besides, Constancia's mind could take care of itself. She gave proof of this a moment later by humming a gay little Mexican folk song. Pretty soon she tacked makeshift English lyrics onto the tune, softly, barely loud enough to be heard in adjoining rooms.

Red couldn't believe his ears, when she sang:

"Derringer in his sleeve,
It jumps at you.
Killed policeman in my house."

She hummed a few bars, then:

"I wouldn't sell him letters,
So he carried me off.
Damn his bloody eyes!"

Again she hummed for a moment, and:

"Hope you're here, Jimmy Doane.
Not because I love you, fool!
But dark cellars and rats, ugh!
I hate 'em, sweetheart."

Notwithstanding the gravity of the situation, Red almost laughed aloud. Dadblame that girl! He'd like to give her a big hug. That derringer business might save his life before this thing was finished.

Jimmy strained his ears to catch every sound that arose in the house and he almost counted the minutes as they dragged past. His chief fear was that Gretano's men would soon discover that their luggage had been searched. They were talking and laughing in the stable now, evidently taking their time about putting up the horses, but at any moment he expected one of them to return to his room and raise a howl.

Announced by the tinkle of glass and the click of his heels on the patio porch, the count came in.

"Here is your champagne, my lady," he said sarcastically, "an old bottle that I have been saving for a special occasion."

"Is this such an occasion, my beautiful count?"

"Yes, for I have kidnaped my first woman."

"A brave deed, but dumb!" She paused, added, "You killed a policeman."

"What of it?" retorted Gretano coldly. "They will find him in your house. Have you stopped to think that the reputation of *your* house is such as to make the presence of a dead policeman a hard thing to explain? *I* had thought of it, little one. your testimony will be—ahh—tainted, so to speak."

"Mmmm! This wine *is* good," she said sweetly. "You think of everything, Luigi, or *nearly* everything. Your mind must have been wandering when you wrote me those gorgeous love letters."

Jimmy Doane listened hard. He didn't want to miss a word of this, for apparently Constancia was trying to goad the Italian into saying something dangerous to himself.

Luigi Gretano spoke perfect Spanish and he could put scorn into his voice, sarcasm into his words, "I was a young man infatuated by a charming girl. I did not suspect that there was poison in her charms. I would have fought the man who said she was the most loathesome of creatures, a blackmailer."

"Fill my glass, Gretano, dear," requested Constancia in honeyed tones. "Do you think that a blackmailer is more loathesome than an extortionist?"

"Why do you ask?" he snapped.

"Ohhh, such questions just come to me —a woman's whim, I presume."

The cold nerve of that girl, thought Red. She had no assurance that he was there to protect her. He could almost see her heavily-lashed eyes building a fire under the Italian.

Gretano swore with feeling. "Was it a woman's whim that caused you to place a price of ten thousand *pesos* on my letters and, when I accepted your offer, raise it to fifty thousand?"

"No, no, count of mine! That was my business sense. If they were worth ten thousand to you, of course they were worth fifty."

Silence for a moment. Red could imagine her looking at Luigi over her wine glass in that certain way of hers.

"And, besides," she pouted, "I was mad at you for writing me another letter and signing it *Los Asesinos*. Why did you do that?"

THE Italian was having trouble with his temper. His voice showed it. In English with scarcely an accent, he growled, "Because I woke up to the fact that you had been playing me for a sucker and I thought that *Los Asesinos* thing would bluff you."

She, too, spoke English, "Luigi, honey, you're cute as a toy dog. If you had a few brains in your good-looking head I'd swear you were the boss of *Los Asesinos* himself, But *he's* smart."

She paused, added thoughtfully, "Of course, you *did* know what was going to happen to poor Doctor Hernandez, so I should suspect you. But, no! You haven't the brains."

Red stopped breathing, listened.

"Drink your wine!" commanded Gretano. "I have work to do. You are going to the cellar where my rats will entertain you."

Red cursed to himself. She was clever, but the Italian had side-stepped cleanly. It made no material difference, though. If the carriage got through with the book and papers the police now had enough evidence to convict this bunch of murderers.

Somewhere in the house a door slammed. Jimmy glanced at Domingo. The Indian was standing like a wooden image with a long knife in its dark hand.

The caustic exchange continued in the main room, but Red listened with half an ear only. He was waiting on the man beyond the door that slammed. Ought to hear from the fellow before long. The others were out in the patio now, where they had apparently stopped to talk after leaving the stable. Suddenly rapid steps beat on the patio flagstones. Conversation ended abruptly out there. Jimmy guessed that the man inside had made the expected discovery and come to whisper the news to his friends. A few moments later all three hurried back to their rooms.

Red breathed into Domingo's ear, "Those men will soon come to talk to their chief. When they do, you go back through the dining room and into the patio. Stop near a window where you can see and be ready to attack them from behind when trouble starts. I will give them a chance to surrender. They will not. Strike to kill, my boy, or you will get killed."

"Yes, Master. Teoyaomiqui has said that those men must die."

His whisper was as unemotional as the voice of Fate. It rasped the Texan's taut nerves. He hated bloodshed. Try as he might, he couldn't estimate the time that had passed since he sent for the police. Not enough, though, he figured. Feet sounded in the patio, rapid, belligerent feet pounding their way to the main room.

Red nodded to Domingo. The Indian slipped through the curtains and into the dining room as silently as the shadow of his god.

Beyond the portieres on the right Constancia was evidently stalling for time. Luigi Gretano's voice rose in anger, "Of a certainty I am rich, but where I get my money is none of your affair and I will not pay you one—!"

A KNOCK at the door interrupted him. It opened and three excited voices burst into Italian, all talking at once.

Taking advantage of the confusion, Jimmy darted from the window to the archway. The portieres hung in thick folds, oriental cashmere, dark blue and ornamented by numerous mirrors the size of a half-dollar embroidered onto the cloth. Red put those mirrors to a good use. Standing with his cheek against the wall he reached up with the barrel of his Colt and shifted the end curtain ring so as to cause that fold to swing slightly inward. Two feet from his eyes were a dozen or more mirrors, each reflecting a section of the room beyond and by moving the curtain ever so little he could get the whole scene.

First he saw Constancia Cordova. She was sitting comfortably in a chair of crimson plush, very nearly beautiful in a black velvet gown with a black *mantilla* draped around her bare shoulders and a single red rose in her hair. Smiling, too, smiling at him! She looked away quickly, though. Other mirrors showed him the three Italians; two burly fellows of the wrestler type, one tall spare and snaky looking. He also got a good view of Luigi Gretano, who looked more like a common murderer and less like proud nobility now. The chief listened briefly, snapped a few questions at his men and stalked angrily into his study.

He was back in practically no time. His once aristocratic face was scarcely recognizable now, for rage, fear and savagery had made of it a brutish thing. His eyes were fixed upon the girl when he came in. Without a word he went to where she was sitting.

Constancia looked up at him. She laughed aloud!

"Why, Luigi!" she cried. "If it were not for the scar under your eye you would be positively beautiful now!"

The little fool! thought Red. He moved back to where he could look directly into the room through a small space between the arch and portiere.

Gretano towered over the girl in silence for a long moment, obviously struggling with black thoughts. Presently he spoke. His voice was steady. He held onto his temper, chose his words with care, "I now know that you are more than a blackmailer. You are a treacherous little snake. You and that bandit lover of yours set a trap for me. While you were entertaining me in your home, he robbed mine.

He found what he was looking for and has fled with it to the police. He would not stay here and fight me man to man, the coward!"

Constancia inclined her head with a wise little smile.

The tall Italian squared his shoulders. He announced melodramatically, "Very well, I *am* chief of *Los Asesinos!* Armed with my confession and the papers your bandit has stolen, you could collect twenty-five thousand *pesos* blood-money if—"

Constancia lifted a small white hand. "Only half, Luigi. My Diego will get half."

Veins stood out on his neck and forehead. "If, as I was saying, I was fool enough to get caught and you lived to get

the money. But neither will happen. I have a cave in the *pedregal.**"

"My men and I go there now. Later we will come out and hunt down your lover. Afterwards we will move to another country having rich fools and beautiful women. We will go on living and having our fun, but you, my Constancia—!"

He stopped, nodded to one of his men and moved back a pace. "Raimondo!"

The lean Italian stepped forward. His sunken eyes blazed eagerly, his thin face had the look of a hawk's. He drew a knife.

The girl cowered in her chair, staring at the knife like a person hypnotized by a bright object. She clutched her *mantilla* tightly around her throat and breast with both hands. But not once did she so much as steal a glance in Jimmy's direction.

Two long quick steps carried him into the room. His fiber soles made no sound. The Italians were so intent upon the murder in prospect, Gretano was apparently the only one who heard the tinkle of the mirrors when the curtains moved and none seemed aware that the patio door had opened behind them. Overhead, the lamp in the crystal chandelier fluttered an alarm that went unheeded.

"Ar-r-riba!" growled Red. (Colloquial "hands up!")

Gretano stood for an instant like a man suddenly face to face with an evil spirit, then his arms shot up. A derringer exploded in his right hand, shattering the lamp chimney.

Raimondo Verdi, the man with the knife, spun his sinuous body like a snake and leaped to attack in the same movement. The Texan's forty-five blasted him full in his face, flung him to the floor—dead.

Jimmy dropped instantly to get away from the background of mirrors which picked up all the light there was. On the far side of the room Gretano's six-shooter burst into flame at the moment he fell. A bullet burned the side of his neck. He held his fire, thinking of the girl. A second later he saw Constancia's white shoulders and face disappear behind her chair.

Meanwhile one of the burly Italians was going down, clutching at his throat with one hand, wildly flourishing a gun with his other. Silhouetted against light from the patio door the Indian sprang like a giant spider onto the back of the remaining assassin. His thin arm darted up. A knife flickered down. The two men fell and rolled on the floor, a tangle of threshing arms and legs.

The door to Gretano's study slammed. Its bolt shot home noisily. The chief of *Los Asesinos* was making his getaway!

RED DOANE jumped to his feet, swore he'd take the man alive. The only outside door in the house opened into the reception room and all windows were barred, but each room had a door on the patio. A glance told Jimmy that Domingo was getting the best of the fight on the floor. He ran past the combatants, into the patio.

The two tall men met at the door of Gretano's bedroom. Evidently he had expected the Texan to be there, for the gun in his left hand exploded at the instant he appeared. Its bullet glanced from Red's right ribs, jarred him to his heels, but failed to stop the lightning downward slash that he had already launched with the barrel of his Colt. The Italian's gun went spinning. A split-second later Jimmy caught Gretano's right wrist. The double-barreled derringer fired its last bullet into the porch roof. Doan's gun-hand was free and he could've shot the Italian then. Instead, he tried to hook the barrel of his weapon to the man's head in the clinch. By a quick lunge with his shoulder Gretano blocked the blow, pinned the Texan's arm against the side of the doorway. A sharp stone bit to the bone and his fingers con-

* A lava plain adjoining the town. It contained numerous caves and was the refuge of criminals. Ragged goat and sheep herders acted as lookouts and accomplices. Police rarely got their man in there. C C

vulsively released the gun. At the same instant the Italian jerked a short dagger. Red threw himself backward with all his strength and they went down together. Thereafter they fought on the flagstone porch with the savage brutality of wild beasts, one dressed in the proper evening clothes of an aristocrat, the other garbed in the white cotton of a peon covered by dark stains—the servants' wine and his own blood.

Jimmy fell underneath. Gretano struck downward at the Texan's throat with the knife. The best that Red could do was to deflect the blow. The blade slashed through an inch of his shoulder muscle, hit the rock under him and broke off at the hilt. Quick as a flash the Italian drove the handle into his face. That hurt! It was the spark that ignited the redheaded American's rage. He had been fighting to capture Gretano; now he wanted to beat the man to death.

Red struck viciously with his elbow. It crunched home to the Italian's jaw, dazed him momentarily. The Texan's lean tough body twisted from beneath the heavier man and they staggered to their feet. Doane went berserk then. He leaped in and drove Gretano back with a rain of blows that cut the flesh from his own hard knuckles and battered the Italian's face to shreds. Nothing could hurt Red now. Gretano kicked, gouged, jabbed with the barrel of the empty derringer, but the savage beating continued. He crouched and threw his arms around his head to escape the bony fists that were ruthlessly chopping him down instead of mercifully knocking him out. At length he turned to run. A long looping blow caught him at the burr of the ear. He pitched headforemost into a stone pillar.

Red Doane sank back against the wall. His ribs rose and fell as he dragged air into his lungs and his arms hung straight down, too heavy to lift. He shook blood from his eye sockets.

After a few moments Domingo Zala came running. His clothing was stained and torn, his knife was in his hand. He looked anxiously up at Jimmy, and inquired, "Are you hurt badly, my Master?"

"No, *muchacho*. Just a little tired."

"I would have come sooner, Master, but one of those *tsesinos* wanted very much to live."

He went and looked closely at Gretano. As calmly as if he had never known an exciting moment, he remarked, "This one is dead outside, Senor, but there is life in him. Shall I let it out when he awakes from his *siesta?*"

Jimmy shook his head.

The Indian nodded obediently. Gazing down at Gretano, he said, "This one was in the coach. Perhaps her shadow could not find him in there."

He stepped into the patio, glanced quickly at the sky, and shrugged. "Teoyaomiqui is gone now. What she does not know will not hurt you, Master."

Constancia Cordova showed up then, every hair in place, looking very fresh and pretty.

Before she could say anything Red tried to grin with his battered face, and demanded, "Where in hell have you been all this time?"

"I fainted."

"*You*—fainted? Cain't hardly believe it."

She glanced at Domingo, who was sitting on his heels a yard from Gretano, apparently communing with his gods. "If you had seen that pet devil of yours whittling down those two Italian gorillas, Jeemie, I betcha *you'd* have fainted. How're you feeling, honey?"

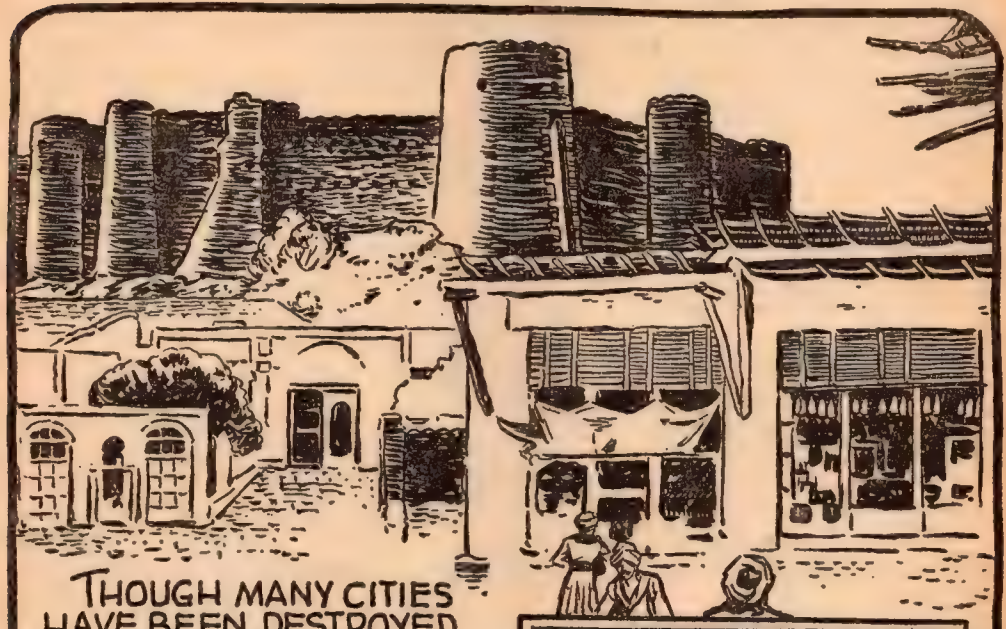
"Rotten!"

Constancia puckered her lips, and said, "Brrrr! So do I. Let's get married and go to some quiet place and settle down. I've had my fun and you've had yours. I want to grow old with a red-headed, long-legged Texas man. What say, honey?"

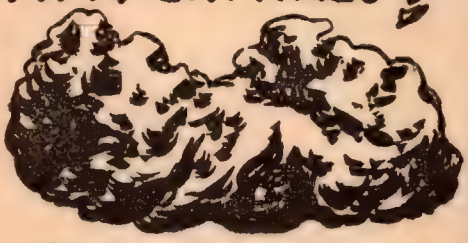
"Listen! Yonder come the police."

"Damn you, Jeemie Doane!"

Curioddities By Weill



THOUGH MANY CITIES HAVE BEEN DESTROYED THROUGH THE AGES BECAUSE OF **WAR**, *NONE HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO RUINS SO MANY TIMES AS* **HERAT, AFGHANISTAN,** *WHICH WAS* **BURNED TO THE GROUND FIFTY-SIX TIMES!**



ONLY TWO OR THREE **GOLD NUGGETS** WEIGHING MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED POUNDS HAVE EVER BEEN FOUND! THE **"WELCOME" NUGGET**— ONE OF THE LARGEST IN THE WORLD WAS DUG UP AT BALLARAT, AUSTRALIA, IN 1858 ***AND WEIGHED 126 POUNDS!***

THE **WEAVER-BIRD OF AFRICA** BUILDS AN UP-SIDE-DOWN NEST, BUT MAKES IT SO CLEVERLY *THAT THE EGGS DO NOT FALL OUT!*

WHERE ARE PIGS USED TO END WARS? *See Curioddities next time.*

The Accusing Hand Wavered So That It Pointed Out as the Murderer Practically Every Man in the Lifeboat

DEAD RECKONING

By PHIL RICHARDS

IN THE bow of No. 4 lifeboat Kurt Prentice studied the blazing freighter with an eye to salvage. Not a chance. The *Baracoa Trader* was listing hopelessly. Seas were roaring into the jagged hole amidships where the torpedo had torn her heart out, and shortly three million dollars would vanish into the gray Atlantic.

He yelled at an A. B. to cut away the falls, to cast them off. He looked up at the shattered wing of the bridge and touched a hand to his uniform cap. A salute to the man who had died in his place. What a piece of fool's luck he'd drawn this trip! All the way to Capetown he'd nursed a persecution complex, doctoring it with rye off watch, because office politics ashore had cheated him of the second mate's berth.

When the German U-boat, a half hour ago, had opened fire without warning, Prentice had been asleep in his bunk amidships. The concussion from the torpedo had pitched him to the deck. That was all. But the bridge was a shambles from the strafing of the sub's three-incher. Up there in the flaming chartroom lay the mangled corpses of the captain and the second mate. If he hadn't been masterminded out of his rightful job back in New York, Prentice would have been

standing the second mate's watch, and it would have been his body lying there alongside the Old Man's.

The A. B. was hacking at the ropes when a cry broke out from above. The beam of Prentice's flash, shining on the boat deck, spotlighted a white mess coat and a fear-twisted face between gesticulating arms. Prentice swore and shoved the A. B. back. Down the ropes came Rogan, the sailors' messman, in a palm-scorching slide.

"What kind of a third mate are you?" Rogan whined at Prentice. "Leavin' a man! Wait till they hear about this shoreside! You'll be on the beach for life."

Prentice pushed him onto a thwart. "You should have been at your station ten minutes ago."

The A. B. finished his work at the falls, and the men dipped the oars, anxious to pull away from the stricken ship that—if she didn't blow up—could drag them under from the draft of her sinking.

The sky was graying in the east. Through the rain-lashed murk No. 4 leaped and pranced in the hissing seas, riding perilously to foaming crests and diving into boiling craters. Prentice peered through his binoculars, trying to locate the other lifeboats. None was in sight. He muttered an oath. Two of the boats were without navigators. Unless they were picked up right away——

He shifted the glasses to the dying ship and let out a yell.

"Back water port! Put about. Man aboard!"

Against the glare of the flaming midship house a figure was outlined at the rail, half bent over it and waving a hand drunkenly.

"To hell with him!" Rogan screamed. "You'll get us all killed!"

The faces of the men were strained, but their lips were pressed tightly, and when No. 4 pounded out of a deep trough, they got the boat's head swung toward the *Baracoa Trader.*

With great effort the man worked his body across the rail and fell into the water. He went under, and when his head bobbed up, he was thrown about in the bursting seas like a dead floater, face down and arms outspread. A driving swell flung him toward No. 4, and as the boat dipped into a trough, Prentice and Greer the bosun got their hands on the man and hauled him over the gunwale.

He was one of the passengers, a stocky man dressed in a light pongee suit, full faced, rugged, youngish, though with a touch of gray at the temples. Prentice didn't know his name. Since the homeward-bound *Baracoa Trader's* departure from Capetown nine days before, the man had been about the decks very little.

"Wow!" exclaimed Greer, swearing. "Look at the job someone did on him!"

The unconscious man's shirt was ripped to ribbons and stained from the blood of several knife wounds. Crimson trickled from his mouth. His breathing was convulsive and as harsh as the wheezing of a clogged suction pump.

"Quick!" Prentice yelled. "Whiskey. Under that after thwart. Get those oars moving, you, or we'll all—"

A bottle was passed forward and Prentice spilled whiskey into the passenger's mouth. The man choked, shuddered, and his body locked in the rigidity of a spasm. Another dose of liquor. The bite of it took hold, shocking numbed nerves out of their dying lethargy. The hands shook. The eyelids fluttered, opened. The man's stare was blank, and Prentice fed him more whiskey. It was brutal, yet it was a kindness. Prentice was giving the man a chance to name his killer.

Gray dawn was breaking, with light enough in the leaden skies to show the face of everyone in the lifeboat. They were strained, pale, as though each man was waiting for the accusation to fall upon him. The passenger's wavering eyes steadied a little, shifted from one face to another. His lips moved, but his efforts to

speak bogged down into throaty gibberish. Another tilt of the bottle enabled him to marshal his wasting strength. A trembling hand came up slowly.

"He—he—" the man gasped after a fit of coughing, "murdered—me—"

The pointing hand wavered so that, except for Prentice, it included everyone in the lifeboat—from Greer the bosun to the A. B.'s and ordinary seaman, the cook, the oiler, the third assistant engineer, another passenger, and Rogan the messman. The hand dropped and Prentice realized that a corpse was leaning against him.

"Who was he pointin' at?" Quade the cook blurted. "Wasn't me! Wasn't me! I got religion." And he went down on his knees to demonstrate.

Each staring at his neighbor as though probing for the other's guilt, the men failed to see another death taking place. The bow of the *Baracoa Trader,* wreathed in smoke, lifted out of the water, shooting almost straight up. The freighter paused there, as though balancing on its rudder, and then she sank in a boil of steam and bubbles.

"As if we haven't got enough trouble," Greer said, staring bitterly at the corpse.

The crew was resentful toward the man for not dying aboard ship. Prentice shared the feeling.

"There's a murderer among us!" Quade the cook shouted it as a revelation. "We'll all be slaughtered!"

The bosun slugged him. "Keep your ideas to yourself, Cookie."

Yet there was no dodging the fact. Among the eleven men—misfits and lubbers, most of them—was a man who, having killed, would not be loath to resort to murder again at the first risk of exposure.

Prentice could shape his course and plot his position. He could fight the little craft through tropic storms, cajole its sail into every vagrant puff of the doldrums. He could control the rationing of food and water, work some semblance of usefulness from every hand; and maintain, as long as starvation didn't reduce them to cannibals, a measure of ship's discipline. But the safety of these men was the responsibility of his command; he didn't know the first thing about unraveling a murder case.

Here he was with an unknown killer, who had as cozy a set-up as a murderer could wish for. To do a man in without leaving a trace, no better spot could be found than an open boat plunging and bucking in mountainous seas on a black, storm-lashed night.

"Pardon me, Mr. Prentice," spoke a quiet-mannered, rather handsome middle-aged man whose lanky figure was dressed in a gray pin-stripe suit. Except for the deceased, he was the only passenger in No. 4 boat. "Perhaps we can learn something by searching the clothes. I had a little smoking-room chat with him last week. The name is Clark, I believe. Had something to do with a motion-picture chain in South Africa."

HE PULLED a detective's badge from his pocket. "Jim Avery, sergeant, New York Homicide Squad. Just finished chasing a murderer through eighteen countries, so it ought not to be too difficult to single out our man here."

Prentice looked at the badge and then nodded. "Good. Find him quick and we'll lash him down. We've got enough things to worry about. We're outside the steamer tracks. The wind won't let us make Africa, so we'll have to ride the southeast trades to the Brazilian coast. Tough trip. And if we hit the doldrums—"

The search didn't help them.

"Stripped clean," Avery said. "Must have been the work of a professional. We'll keep his clothes, anyway. Laundry marks, you know, haberdashers' brands, and so forth."

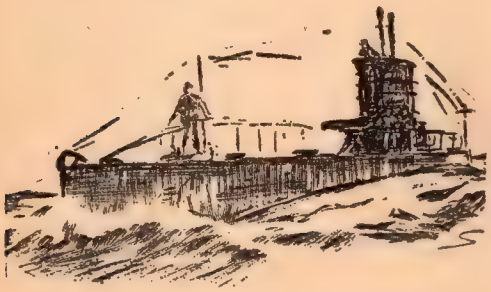
By now the mast was stepped, the sail set, and No. 4 was running before a stiff breeze. In shipping the tiller, the ordi-

nary seaman mashed a finger, and Avery broke out his first-aid kit.

"I thought this would come in handy," he said. "Plenty of bandage, tape, iodine. Help yourself any time. Couple of containers of tooth powder, too, if any one's interested."

It was mid-morning before Greer and an A. B., having removed the clothes, finished sewing the passenger in canvas cut from the boat cover.

Prentice looked at the finished work and frowned. "Too bad we can't tie a sack of coal to him." He gazed out where ugly fins were cutting zigzags in the choppy water. "I don't know anything to say, and he certainly wouldn't thank me to have Cookie maunder over him. So let him go, Bosun."



They pushed the canvas-shrouded bundle into the sea. It went under and came up to float just below the surface like a water-logged pile.

"Look!" Avery yelled.

Prentice glanced aft and shrugged. "Tiger sharks. What did you expect? We did all we could for him. Those man-eaters are always hungry, and they're not particular who kills their food."

Fins were gliding in from all points. The reddening water around the body churned with swarming rapacity. Gigantic brown, dark-spotted bodies thrashed furiously, leaping into the air with serrated teeth gleaming and shreds of flesh and canvas clinging to scimitar mouths.

"Why upset yourself watching it?" Prentice said.

But Avery continued to stare long after the last particle had been devoured and the fins were darting elsewhere in the endless search for prey.

"It could happen to us," Avery muttered. "All of us. A swamping sea and—"

HE SHOOK himself out of it and returned to his work, which was to have everyone searched, including Prentice and himself. It was a tedious job. They went through the clothes of the three A. B.'s, the O. S., the oiler, the third assistant.

As the men were checked off, Rogan began acting like a junkie deprived of his drug, while Quade the cook was on his knees half the time, clasping his hands, mumbling, staring aloft.

"Take Greer!" Rogan blurted when they reached him. "I saw him in the passenger accommodations last night. He's been hanging around that little brunette in Stateroom Eight."

Rogan was one of the friendless little men one sees bussing crockery in South Street beaneries and mopping up Bowery barrel houses. Aboard ship they never get better than a seaman's or fireman's mess, and they come back from the tropics as pallid as when they left. Rogan himself was scrawny, concave-chested, with a big Adam's apple, a tight mouth, a rodent's upper teeth.

Greer went for him. "You blabbin' little gopher—"

Prentice and Avery got between them.

Inside Rogan's shirt they found a sheaf of greenbacks—five thousand dollars.

"That's mine!" Rogan screamed. "It has nothing to do with the stiff."

"You were the last one in the boat," Prentice said.

"Because I got guts!" Rogan yelled, snatching at the money. "While you yella hamdonies was divin' for the lifeboat, I was lookin' for a stake. Riskin' my life, that's what I was!"

"An' doing a little shiv work," Greer said.

"Like hell!" Rogan snapped. "I went through smoke an' flame for it. Yes, sir. The Old Man's cabin was all shot to hell. A three-incher from the sub sprung the door of the captain's safe. That's where I snaffled the dough—an' it's mine!"

Avery looked at Prentice. "Could be. I'm inclined to think otherwise."

"If you're telling the truth, Rogan," Prentice said, "you have a rightful claim on most of this money, but you'll have to wait until a court awards it to you as salvage."

On Greer they found a snapshot of the brunette passenger Rogan had mentioned.

"You see!" Quade spoke hysterically, getting off his knees. "Rogan was right. Greer was foolin' around where he shouldn't 'a' been, an' that passenger caught him, an' threatened to tell the Old Man. The bosun slugged the guy, who hit back, an' it ended with the bosun pullin' a shiv."

Greer laughed. He wore dungarees and a hickory shirt. His weather-beaten features were bold, his eyes insolent, and about his broad frame was an air of swagger and irrepressible self-assurance.

"The company owes me dough for keepin' the female trade happy. Wait till they get to you, Cookie. You wouldn't have been on your knees so much if you didn't have something to hide."

There was something to that. In Quade's wallet were two thousand dollars.

"My own money!" Quade bleated. He was a swart, slump-bellied man with flaccid jowls and an appearance of habitual untidiness. "I've been savin' for years. Look in my bankbook there. Thirty-five hundred rung up. Think I'd cook all these years for a pack of bilge rats if there wasn't any squeeze?"

"Lash 'em down, Prentice," the oiler said. "They probably operated on that guy together."

"Don't tie us!" Rogan screamed. "It'd be murder! If the boat swamps, the rest of you float around, but we drown!"

Prentice nodded. "This isn't a court. I can't jeopardize a man's life because of suspicion. I'm not having anyone tied unless he's caught doing something against the safety of the others. You're all warned. There's a murderer among us. Protect yourself."

The oiler grabbed a spreader—a support for the boat cover—and there was a rush for defense weapons. Rogan brandished a stretcher—a foot brace.

"You're all against me, so I'm tellin' you. I'm stickin' up in the bow nights, an' any lug comes near me gets this!"

After dark a lantern was secured low on the mast. Soon a heavy squall hit them. The light went out, the rain lasted through the night, and it was impossible to get the lantern burning again. At dawn Prentice found that his flashlight was missing, and with it all the spare rope and the murdered passenger's clothes.

"If you'd only 'a' lashed them two down!" the oiler whined.

"What are you talkin'?" Rogan wailed from the bow. "I've been huggin' up here all night."

The men were each rationed a biscuit and a cup of water. The sun came out and those off watch were able to sleep. Prentice got out his sextant and took a sight. When the position was plotted, he wrote in the log what had happened, and then caught a few hours rest. In the late afternoon, while some of the men played cards, he looked over the only reading they had aboard, an eight-page section of the Capetown *Herald,* more than three weeks old, in which an A. B. had wrapped some of his gear. On the back page Prentice found an item about Avery.

" 'After trailing him through eighteen countries'," Prentice read aloud, " 'Sergeant James Avery of the New York Homicide Bureau captured Mason Van Sant, an escaped murderer, at the Good Hope Tavern yesterday. Van Sant, for-

merly a chief officer on North Atlantic liners, also is wanted in the United States on an espionage charge. Pending extradition, Van Sant has been committed to the city prison'."

"Yeah," Avery spoke grimly. "That's the guy. Murdered one man and cost the lives of nearly fifty more. Broke out of the Capetown jail and stowed away on the *Plantano Merchant,* bound for Argentina. We had an idea he'd done something like that, so we radioed all ships that had cleared Capetown. The skipper of the *Plantano* wirelessed back that he had our man. The message revealed his position to a German U-boat, and the *Plantano* was sunk with all hands."

That evening Prentice saw something in the distance that he thought was a small whale; but when No. 4 overhauled it, he saw that it was No. 1 of the *Baracoa Trader,* the master's boat, bottom side up.

Prentice put out the sea anchor and hove to, while all hands went on lookout for survivors, maintaining the vigil until night closed down.

"They're gone," Prentice said. "That's what comes of a lifeboat putting out minus a navigator or experienced hands."

The men were half-crazy after that, suspicious of every move, and the night was filled with threats and cries of warning. Prentice kept a lantern burning, but during the squalls its blur did no more than reveal itself.

Morning brought another casualty. Someone had taken off the top of a biscuit tin, and salt water had soaked the hard tack into mush.

"Well, anyway," Prentice muttered, "the one who did it will suffer as much as the others. It cuts our rations in two. A biscuit and a half a day."

"Can't we dry out and eat this slop?" Avery asked.

"It'd be as bad as swallowing rock salt," Prentice said. "A slow, choking death."

"We'll starve!" Quade wailed.

"Not while we have you, Cookie," Greer said. "You made the *Baracoa Trader* the hungriest craft I've ever been on, so you know who'll be served up first when the chow runs out."

FOR three days the trades were with them, and No. 4 made as high as five knots an hour. Then they hit the doldrums, the equatorial calms that left the sail a limp, forlorn rag. All day and night they were pounded and shunted about in heavy seas; but the only distance they made was from the current, and that was in the opposite direction.

"How long can this last?" Avery asked.

"Weeks sometimes, or we might pick up a breeze in an hour."

Prentice cut the rations to a biscuit a day; then to three-quarters; then to one-half. A week passed without a full sail, days of intolerable boredom, nights of maddening fear. The tropic sun cooked them so that their legs were often swollen, their bodies raw and blistered.

The playing cards fell apart, and there was nothing to do but sit and starve. Greer was the cheerful one. He had an endless repertoire of ribald jokes and songs. At first the men listened, but his cheerfulness began to grate, and he gradually caught on that silence was preferred. For hours they would sit, the eleven of them, without a word spoken.

Rogan's sullen taciturnity was complete. He hadn't talked since the biscuit was spoiled and the men accused him. He never moved from the bow, and even the threat of no rations couldn't make him stand a watch. His eyes, beady, defiant, more than half-mad, followed the others around. Whenever anyone came near him, he humped up like a caged animal, tightening his hold on the stretcher, but never uttering a word.

The day came when Prentice saw in the sextant mirror that his gums were turning dark and bleeding a little. His teeth were sensitive, and they felt loose to the pressure of his tongue. Others were so af-

flicted. Scurvy. Just a hint of it, but it wouldn't take long to bring them to an agonizing death.

Again he shortened rations; but that night the wind returned, and once more No. 4 bobbed and pranced through rough seas.

"At this rate," he told the men, "we'll soon be inside the traffic lanes."

He stretched out in his oilskins and relaxed for the first time since the torpedoing. He dozed off, but soon awakened. The night was inky black, but he could dimly see the white patch of canvas. The wind was strong, but the sail was loose, fluttering.

Prentice jumped up and started aft. "Who's the farmer on that tiller? You're luffing, you fool, spilling wind out of the sail!"

Something swooped down in front of him. A streak of fire ran along his collar bone. Then he was down, clutching his burning, bleeding shoulder and cursing savagely, while the frightened watch got a lantern going.

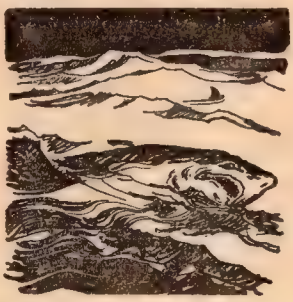
Avery climbed over a thwart and pulled back Prentice's oilskin and shirt. An A. B. held the lantern close. Along Prentice's left shoulder the flesh was laid open for three inches.

"Close carving!" Avery said. "Skidded off your collar bone. A quarter inch over, and we would have had to sew you up in canvas."

WHILE Avery broke out his first-aid kit, Prentice continued to curse. "I would have this damned oilskin on! Kept the blood from spurting on the rat! Hell, why didn't I have sense enough to yank something from his clothes?"

An A. B. folded a sou'wester and stuck an edge of it in Prentice's mouth for him to clamp his jaws on. Working in the glare of the lantern, with the boat cover held over them, Avery sluiced the wound with fresh water, doused it liberally with iodine, covered it with cotton dabbed with zinc ointment, and did a skillful job of bandaging.

Prentice tried to pick out his assailant. It was hopeless. When exhaustion forced him to lie down again, it was to shiver in frequent drenchings when the heeling boat took it white over the lee gunwale. The brine gnawed at his shoulder wound, but shock was wearing his nerves into a state of anesthesia.



A shrieking southeast wind drove them through cascades of creaming seas. The boat scaled white-ribbed walls of dark water, its bow shooting out into the smoke of stinging spume. It lunged into deep gorges where the wind died out of the sail and the breaking crests threatened to wash them down to Fiddler's Green. But always No. 4 rode out the peril, to make westing, to stagger, lurching and pitching, closer to the South American steamer tracks.

Prentice was drifting into a stupor when something snapped him alert. An alien sound had reached him through the roar of the night. A scream, he thought. He wasn't sure. The whole boat was astir, but the lantern was out again. He could detect movement, though in the screeching darkness the men were only shifting blurs.

His groping hand got an A. B. by the arm. The man shrank back, swinging a bailer.

"Break out another lantern," Prentice yelled. "Act alive now."

In the shelter of the boat cover, he got the lamp burning. Its yellow light glared on the gaunt faces of stricken men. Prentice stumbled forward.

Wedged in the bow lay the body of Rogan. A gash reached from his left ear past the windpipe.

The men looked on like starved oxen, blinking hollowed eyes, too benumbed and whipped to register the terror that was deep in them.

Avery pulled himself up weakly from the bottom boards amidships. He blew out his breath.

"Well, anyway," he spoke to Prentice, "it vindicates you for not lashing him down."

"Look," an A. B. muttered. "His mouth's all dark. What caused that?"

"I intend to find out," Prentice said. He glanced at the chronometer. "An hour and a half to daylight. Throw the boat cover over him. We can't do anything with this light."

Soon after Rogan's body was covered, a tropical rain squall deluged them. The lantern was no more than a jaundiced glare in the pelting downpour. Nice, Prentice thought. It'll wash out any splatter of blood that could identify the killer.

THE day arrived cold and cheerless and overcast. The wind held, but the squall passed over, and the seas quieted to long swells. Prentice pulled the boat cover from Rogan. The dead messman's open mouth was tinted a deep brown. Prentice leaned close.

"Can't smell anything with the air full of spume," he muttered and turned to Avery. "What do you make of it?"

Avery bent over the body. "Looks like iodine, but—"

"Yeah," Prentice said. "See if anybody's been into your first-aid supplies."

Avery opened the kit and whistled softly. "The iodine bottle's gone. I can't believe— Not suicide— Rogan struck me as one of those misfits who'd hang on no matter what."

"It's a cinch no one fed iodine to him," Prentice said. "He had to take it himself—"

"Sure," Greer said. "He kept thinkin' about the passenger he killed an' what was goin' to happen to him—until he blew his top. Swallowed iodine, an' it burned so bad, he slashed his throat. Knife fell overboard when he dropped."

"Tryin' to pass your guilt onto a dead man!" Quade yelled. "That's what you're doing. But it won't help you none."

"Shut up, Cookie," Greer snapped. "In a few months you're goin' to be fried pig, a la Sing Sing. Maybe you butchered Rogan because he cheated you on the divvy from the passenger you two carved."

"You killed Rogan!" Quade screamed. "Cut his throat. Poured iodine into his mouth afterwards, so you could hash up a suicide story."

"That's a typical suicide's stroke," Avery told Prentice. "Right handed. They never slice clean. It's always down-pulled, a carving slash that leaves the flesh hanging. I've seen scores of them."

Perhaps it was suicide, but the point that made Prentice doubt it was the attack on himself. He didn't believe it had been the messman's work. With the prospect of collecting a big salvage prize, Rogan had had a strong motive for hoping that nothing would happen to the third mate. What nagged Prentice now was the pestering thought that in his own mind were all the jumbled pieces needed to find the answer.

He covered the body again, and sat thoughtfully on the port gunwale beside the cleat to which the boom of the fore-and-aft sail was lashed.

"Avery, will you ration out the biscuit?" He handed his knife to the passenger. "The rest of you to port." That was to keep the boat from shipping so much water over the lee. "If the wind doesn't shift, maybe we'll be spotting smoke on the horizon pretty soon."

With great care Avery cut discs of hard tack and passed each man his quarter section. While he poured the water, he chewed on his own scant ration.

Prentice soaked his biscuit, as did the others, but the last portion he didn't eat.

"The third's gone nuts!" the oiler cried. "Look at him! Feedin' his whack to a stiff!"

It seemed so. With the cover pulled back, Prentice was thrusting a piece of moistened biscuit into the dead Rogan's mouth. He drew it out.

"What color's on this?" he asked the oiler.

"Brown."

"That was a strange procedure," Avery said, handing the knife back.

Prentice took it and shrugged. "A simple problem in addition. Proving two and two are four."

"What do you mean?"

"That your teeth are okay," Prentice said, and opened Avery's first-aid kit.

"I don't follow—"

"I used the starch test for iodine on Rogan," Prentice said. He turned the spout on a can of tooth powder. "If it'd been iodine, the color on the biscuit would have been blue."

From the can he poured out a dark brown powder.

"Here it is, gentlemen," he said. "Concentrated food. The kind, I imagine, parachute troopers carry. Full of vitamins and calories. A seven-course dinner in a thimbleful."

Avery's hand tightened on the starboard gunwale. "Small of me, I admit. Hunting Van Sant, I carried emergency rations. I should have shared—"

THIS concentrated food, Prentice explained, was the reason Avery could chew up hard tack, while raw gums and loosened teeth forced the others to moisten their biscuit. The condition was due to a touch of scurvy, brought on by a lack of vitamin C, and hastened by starvation, shock and exposure.

"Rogan discovered your secret," Prentice spoke to Avery, "and when you caught him pilfering your hoard, you realized he could start a train of reasoning against you. So you murdered him."

"Don't be absurd!"

"And you knifed me!"

"Ridiculous! If I had wanted to kill anyone, I would have shoved him over the side."

Rogan hadn't been pushed overboard alive, Prentice said, because the messman's screams might have resulted in his rescue. After Rogan was knifed, the lantern had been lit too soon for Avery to dispose of the body, which was wedged tightly in the bow.

"As for me, I was carrying seven thousand dollars. You needed that money for your getaway in Brazil."

"My—what?"

HIS getaway. It should be obvious, he told the others, why Avery had disposed of the flashlight, the murdered passenger's clothes, the extra rope. But spoiling the biscuit no doubt had been for the purpose of weakening them so they could offer no hindrance to his flight when they reached land.

"Isn't that so—Mason Van Sant?"

"You're out of your mind!"

"Now why deny," Prentice said, "that you watched tiger sharks eat up the real Sergeant Jim Avery days and days ago?"

Wasn't it logical to believe that, just as Rogan had argued Prentice out of lashing him down, Mason Van Sant aboard the *Baracoa Trader* had induced Sergeant Avery to give him the freedom of the decks, because of the U-boat menace? Then when the ship was torpedoed, Van Sant had knifed Avery, stolen his badge, and retrieved his own first-aid kit.

"You sounded us out the first day about your 'tooth powder'," Prentice said. "If someone had been interested, you would have had to alter your plans a little, but no one would have seen anything suspicious in a globe-trotting detective carrying emergency rations."

Prentice took out a scrap of paper torn

from the Capetown *Herald*. "Says here: 'Van Sant, formerly a chief officer on North Atlantic liners—' That's what clinches my belief. None of these men can work out a position or handle a small boat without coaching. Knowing what can happen to an open boat without a navigator, they wouldn't have dared attack me. But you, Van Sant, a chief officer—"

"You're talking like an idiot!"

A GALE was piping up. Prentice glanced at the sail. It was bellied full.

He gazed over the water heaving in long swells that were growing choppy from the wind.

Quite casually he picked up his knife and sliced the lanyard that secured the sail's boom to a port cleat. The canvas fluttered, then snapped like a gunshot. The spar swung to starboard with terrific force, striking on the chest the man who called himself Avery, and toppling him overboard.

Losing way rapidly, the boat went past him, to wallow in the swells fifty feet beyond.

"Sharks!" he screamed when he broke the surface.

Angular fins were cutting the water all around him.

"Get me out! They'll eat me up like —like—"

"Like Jim Avery?" Prentice yelled.

"Yes! Yes! Like Jim Avery. Get me out! I'm Van Sant!"

"No good!" Prentice answered. "You know—confession under duress. I want something admissible in court. Something tangible—like the knife you used to slice Avery, me, and poor Rogan."

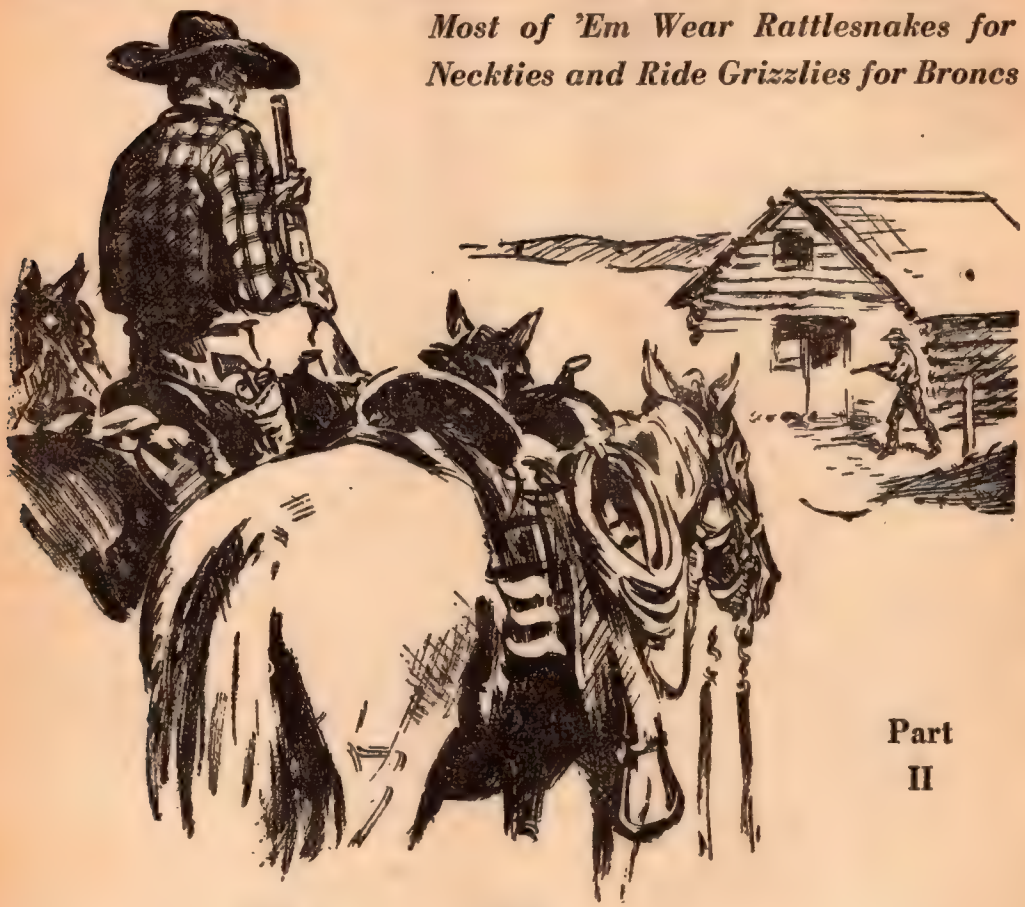
"There it is!" Van Sant screamed. "For the love of God get me out! On the starboard side there!"

Prentice leaned over. Below the waterline the knife was wedged between sections of sheet iron where a rivet had rusted away. Inside, the small leak caused by the missing rivet was hidden behind an air tank. The blade was long and thin and of stainless steel.

"Now, gents," Prentice said, "if you'd been on watch, instead of gawking at me and Van, you would have seen smoke trailing the horizon about four points off our starboard bow. Put some rags in the empty bread tin and send up a good kerosene smudge. The sooner we're out of this, the sooner we'll get the salvage that I've a hunch the court will eventually award us. Cookie, of course, gets back his two grand.

"Pipe down, Van, will you?" he cried. "You've been living too fat. I'm going to let you splash around awhile. Don't mind the fins. I haven't seen a man-eating tiger shark in days. These babies are only sluggish, inoffensive nurse sharks. Harmless as codfish."

They Eat Nails for Breakfast. They Wrastle with Alligators. Most of 'Em Wear Rattlesnakes for Neckties and Ride Grizzlies for Broncs



Part II

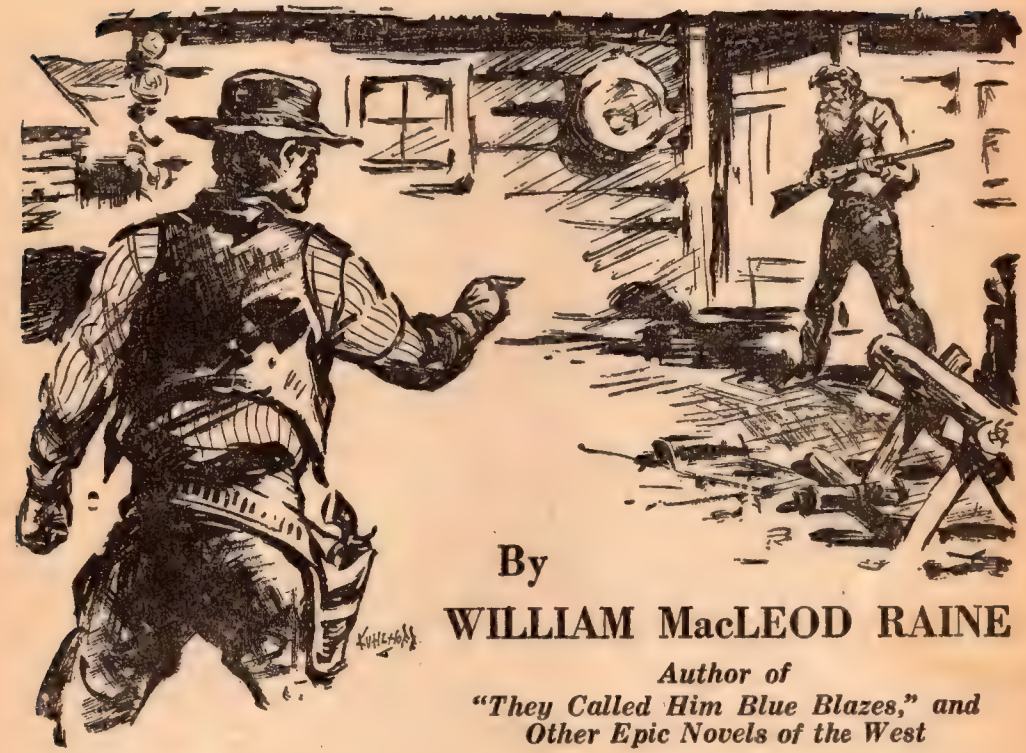
TEXAS TRAILERS

SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE has made the West his hobby and his hunting ground for the best action fiction. We have published many of his novels in SHORT STORIES—stories which have come out afterwards as $2 novels—and "Texas Trailers" is a worthy follow-up for such successes as "They Called Him Blue Blazes" and "Riders of the Rim Rocks."

In this story twin brothers, Lee and Bob Chase, are small cattle owners in Kansas. Bob, the more reckless of the two seemed destined for trouble as sure as sparks fly upward, and is a constant worry to his brother Lee. Bob tangles with the men of a road crew of the Circle Lazy H, and has to get out of the country. He makes for Texas, and shortly Lee follows him. Before the brothers meet in Texas Lee is responsible in San Antonio for the rescue of a young lady—Mary May Jackson, daughter of Colonel Jackson of Fairview Ranch. After that he meets up with Bob and discovers that the Circle Lazy H ranch is nearby.

Bob says they won't have trouble since the trail drivers with whom he had tangled in Kansas aren't back home yet. And anyway, Bob tells his brother he has made an



By

WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE

Author of
"They Called Him Blue Blazes," and
Other Epic Novels of the West

influential friend up in the Nueces country, a man named Searcy who could give him work on his ranch. When Lee investigated Searcy, he was shocked; the man was nothing better than an outlaw. Soon the brothers are involved in a shooting scrap with the Circle Lazy H spread.

CHAPTER X

CHEROKEE SAYS HIS PIECE

BOB found Duke Searcy and Brad Kinney in front of the hotel watching a game of marbles which was being played by four barefoot boys. Brad had brought a chair from the porch to avoid standing.

"We made a deal," Searcy said. "We're going up to Espantosa Lake this afternoon to deliver the stuff. Want to go along with us?"

Promptly Bob said that he did. "I'm getting so I don't like this town," he added. "I don't believe it's a healthy spot for me."

Searcy looked at him quickly. "That shooting we heard hadn't anything to do with you, had it?" he asked.

"In a way," Bob drawled, carefully keeping the excitement out of his voice. "I was the target for five Circle Lazy H warriors."

"No hits?"

"No hits."

"Spill it," Duke said.

Bob told the story of his adventure. He

was not proud of having been saved by a woman. That hurt his pride. But he saw that neither of the men gave any weight to that angle.

"Lucky you ran into Helen Hallett's house," Kinney commented. "Seeing she is the widow of young Mose Hallett, there wasn't a thing Linton could do about it."

Duke had an idea. His eyes sparkled. "You say they went into Poole's place. What say we go down there and devil them?"

That suited Bob. He had lost face and he wanted to regain his self-esteem. Kinney was always ready to join in anything proposed if it was not too much trouble. All three of these men had been cowboys. Like many other range riders, there was a side of them that had never grown up. While on the job they would work twenty hours a day, fight stampedes, rough through blizzards, and plunge into swollen rivers to save a comrade or even stock. But they were as avid for fun as schoolboys, very reckless, and anything with a spice of danger in it drew them like a magnet.

Duke set his wide sombrero at a rakish angle and they sauntered down the street. All of them were armed with revolvers, though they did not expect to have to use them now. Five Circle Lazy H riders might jump Bob when he was alone, but they would step around him very carefully when he was sided by two such redoubtable gunmen as Searcy and Kinney. So all three of them reasoned.

They walked into Poole's place and ranged themselves at one end of the bar. The five Circle Lazy H men were at the other end. Duke Searcy's shoulders brushed those of the heavyset bronco buster, Cherokee. The loud and cheerful conversation of the ranch group died down to jerky monosyllables. The new arrivals were all enemies of the Circle Lazy H. Had they come here to make trouble?

"So this bunch of waddies you met scared you, Bob," Duke began.

"Something terrible," Chase admitted. "I'm still shaking like an aspen leaf. You ought to see them, Duke. Wild hellions from the bosques—ripsnorters every last one of them. They eat nails for breakfast and they wrastle with alligators. Most of 'em wear rattlesnakes for neckties and ride grizzlies for broncs."

"I'll sure take the other side of the street when I meet them," Kinney said, pouring a drink from the bottle.

"Hope I don't dream about them at night," Duke contributed. "Me, I'll walk on tiptoes if ever I see them. They won't have to wave me around any. Tough *hombres* with lots of notches on their guns, I reckon."

"Dead shots too," Bob continued. "Almost any of them could hit the side of a barn—if they are close enough. Just one thing scares them. When a woman says 'Scat!' they light out *prontito*. Don't wait to be swept from the kitchen."

CHEROKEE said, rolling a smoke carefully, "Do any of them hide behind a woman when they get in a jam?"

Bob answered, deliberately, the words almost dripping from his mouth: "No woman here now, Cherokee."

"Move over," Linton said to his bronco buster, and crowded between him and Searcy. "There's not going to be any trouble here."

"Where is it going to be?" Bob asked, a thin derisive smile on his boyish face. "Naturally I'm worrying, since you're going to collect me before sunset."

"It doesn't take eight hours to rub out a smart aleck," growled Cherokee. "I've seen it done in half a second."

"Cut the cackle, Cherokee," the foreman ordered. "We're not starting a war now. Finish your drinks, boys. We'll be hitting the trail."

Duke laughed, softly. "Funny how a man changes his ideas. "Half an hour ago you were shouting war, Linton, and now you're making peace talk. Couldn't be because you're not still five to one, could it?"

The eyes in the foreman's poker face were chill as the waters of a frozen lake. "Don't worry about me, Duke," he warned. "When I get ready to fight I'll fight. This isn't the time."

Searcy waved him aside lightly with a gesture of the hand. "Fine with me. Come a-smokin' any time you like."

Linton walked out of the room followed by his men. Cherokee was the last. He stopped and turned round at the door, his sultry sullen eyes on Chase.

"I don't give a damn about Scheir," he said. "Nick always was a bully asking for trouble. But Tom Dobie was my pal. We came from the same town and played together as kids. When you killed him up there in Dodge you dragged me in to the fuss. It still goes. I'll get you before the day is up."

Bob nodded. "I'll be lookin' out for you, Cherokee."

He did not explain that it had been his brother who killed Dobie. Cherokee would not have cared which one of them had fired the shot since both were involved in the trouble. Moreover, this was Bob's quarrel, and he did not intend to pass the buck.

As the door closed behind Cherokee the outlaw leader slid an appraising look at Chase. "You sure enough stirred up the animals. Looks as if you'll have to light out or settle Cherokee's hash."

Bob flushed resentfully. "Cherokee never saw the day he could drive me away."

"Cherokee is a hard tough *hombre,*" Searcy said. "He has killed more than once. After all, you are pretty young, Bob. What's that about you killing Tom Dobie up in Dodge?"

"It was Scheir I got."

Searcy probed for more information. He rather liked this youngster and he did not want him rubbed out, as he very well might be if he fought with the bronco buster. "Was Scheir shooting at you?" he asked.

"Scheir and Ransom both. They buried Scheir. Ransom lit out."

The outlaw laughed at this nonchalant boast. "All right," he said. "I throw in my hand. But get this. Cherokee means business. Be on guard every minute."

Bob understood his position exactly. When he met Cherokee there would not be a fighting man guarding each flank. The bronco buster had flung down a challenge and he had accepted it. Searcy and Kinney might scout for him to protect against ambush or a mass attack. But that was as far as they would go. He would have to stand up to the Circle Lazy H gunman alone.

That he had been a fool to work himself into this position Bob knew. He ought never to have come out to the Nueces country. But he was in it now. He had to go through to a fighting finish.

CHAPTER XI

BOB SHUTS A DOOR BEHIND HIM

THE Chase brothers had been brought up by a father who was a total abstainer. Captain Chase had died four years ago, a year after the mother of the boys. Until the past three months Bob had never touched liquor, but since he had been frequenting gambling houses he had taken a drink occasionally to prove that he was not a sissy. Now for the first time he poured whiskey into a glass because he felt the need of it.

Duke Searcy picked up the glass and emptied it into a spittoon. "Not today," he said. "Let Cherokee do the drinking. You want to be cold sober when the guns start smoking."

Bob laughed, with a touch of bravado. "All right, Duke. I don't need Dutch courage."

"What about that trip to Espantosa Lake?" Kinney wanted to know. "Bannion wants to start for Hondo Canyon tonight. We've got to turn that stock over to him."

Searcy knew what Brad was thinking,

that they could not leave Bob in town alone to face the Circle Lazy H men after they had sided him at Poole's place. "Bob is going with us to the lake," he decided. "No need for him to stick around all day to suit Cherokee's convenience. We'll be back by five o'clock. It is a good idea for him to disappear for a few hours. Cherokee will start drinking, figuring he has lit out."

"I've got to be back by sunset," Bob said. He wanted to be sure this was not a plan to rescue him from Cherokee.

"We'll be here before then," Duke promised.

During the trip to the lake no reference was made by any of them to the impending duel. Searcy was not at his best as a raconteur. He did not tell any stories of gunfights but confined himself to more pacific tales. One of them was about an experience Kinney had suffered one time while at Dodge after he had helped drive a herd there.

Before he had been in town an hour the money earned by the hard months on the trail was burning his pocket. By a run of luck at a faro table he doubled his nest egg, so that it took him longer than usual to go broke. When he woke up from one last spree, it was to discover that his outfit had gone back to Texas. He was forced to take the first job that offered, which was to whitewash a fine red barn. The man who employed Kinney told him that a crazy Irishman named Waters had a notion it was his barn and might come around bothering him. If Waters got troublesome Kinney was to dump the whitewash over him.

Kinney broke into the narrative to protest. "Doggone it, how was I to know that Waters really did own the barn and the guy who hired me was paying him off for a practical joke he had pulled on him?"

Searcy chuckled. "I had a free reserved seat at the showdown. The Irishman came busting down mad as a wet hen wanting to know what the hell Brad was doing to his barn. Talk about coincidence. This guy Waters was the owner of the gambling place where Brad had lost his money. So our friend here plunked the bucket of whitewash down over his head. Waters liked to of strangled, and as soon as he could see he went for Brad all spraddled out. Gentlemen, hush! It was the best fight I ever saw. Waters had been a prize-fighter and he certainly worked Brad over, but in the end Brad licked him by sheer strength."

BOB pretended to listen but did not. He was not in the humor for funny stories. He could not forget that in a few hours he would hear the crash of Cherokee's .45. Looking back at it now, he could trace the links of the chain of events that had brought him to this. It had begun when he sat down in the Lone Star to play cards with Ransom and Scheir.

He had nothing against Cherokee. He did not want either to kill the bronco buster or be killed by him. But it had to be one or the other. There was no way out now.

Bob was glad when they reached the lake and they rode out to count the cattle in front of Bannion. He could get away from his friends and be alone with his thoughts when he was in the drag drifting the stock past the Hondo Canyon man. He did not have to play up and laugh and pretend to be enjoying himself.

In the late afternoon they rode back to Carrizo. As they passed the outlying adobe houses Searcy made the first reference to what was in all their minds.

"Better wait on the porch of the hotel," he said. "Brad and I will fan out, one on the left and the other on the right, to make sure they don't gang up on you."

It might as well be that way as any, Bob agreed. He sat down in a chair, his back to the wall, and waited. Two other men had been sitting on the porch when Bob seated himself, but they did not stay there long. They left together, hurriedly, heading downtown. Plainly they were decamping from the danger zone. Their exit told

Chase that Cherokee was in town and that everybody in the village knew a battle was about to occur.

Not long now, he knew. The word would spread that he was here and the bronco buster would come to settle the issue. Yet the minutes dragged. It seemed an interminable time before there came to him the first rumor of the approach of his enemy.

DUKE SEARCY was standing in the shadow of the Elite Restaurant wall, he knew, and from him would come a signal to be ready. Near the bridge Kinney was standing underneath a cottonwood. Though he had heard no sound from either of them, he felt sure they were keeping guard for him.

Men were coming down the street. He heard footsteps, a murmur of talk. Then

Searcy's voice rang out, clear and strong.

"You and Ransom taking a stroll, Linton?"

"Making sure there won't be any dirty work, Duke," Linton answered.

"That's fine. On either side." Duke flung a sharp question at the Circle Lazy H men. "Where is Cherokee? Chase has been waiting for him half an hour."

Another voice answered, a little thickly. "He needn't wait any longer. I'm here."

Cherokee speaking. Bob rose from the chair and stood gun in hand, knees bent, body leaning forward a little. His nerves had been at a high pressure, but now that the moment had come he was as cool as if ice water had been in his veins.

"Where's he hiding?" Cherokee demanded.

Bob stepped down from the porch and moved forward to the plank fence. "Waiting at the gate," he called, and was surprised at the cool steadiness of his voice. He remembered afterward that he heard the sound of a horse crossing the bridge, but he blotted from his consciousness for the moment everything except the man advancing out of the dusk toward him.

"Damn you, come out of there," the bronco buster cried. "Quit hiding behind that fence."

Bob flung open the gate and passed through it. He had not meant to leave his shelter, but some urge drove him to it. That Cherokee had been drinking the hoarse voice told him. A tremendous surge of confidence swept through him. In a few seconds he was going to kill the Circle Lazy H gunman.

Flame stabbed the semi-darkness. A bullet crashed through the fence behind him.

Bob's arm lifted, unhurriedly. He saw his enemy's big body draw back, as if it had been hit by a plank, and he knew a bullet had torn into the man's vitals.

Cherokee fired again, three times, the last shot into the ground at his own feet, for a second bullet had plowed into his body. He swayed, reaching out to the air for support, and plunged down into the dusty road.

Bob did not move from where he stood. Two other Circle Lazy H men were in the vicinity, with intentions as yet not declared.

A rider flung himself from a saddle and ran toward him. Bob half turned, to meet attack from either side.

He recognized the runner and lowered his revolver. It was his brother Lee.

CHAPTER XII

LEE AND BOB GO DIFFERENT WAYS

"ARE you hurt?" Lee cried.

"No." Bob looked down at the still figure in the street and then lifted his eyes to peer into the semi-darkness beyond. "If there are any more Circle Lazy H gunmen looking for trouble now is the time to come a-smoking," he called out.

Duke Searcy's gay laugh sounded, tauntingly derisive. "How about it, Linton?"

"This was Cherokee's idea, not ours," the foreman answered coldly. "We came along to see he got a square deal."

"He got it, didn't he?"

"You haven't heard me complain, Duke," Linton replied, his voice harsh and hostile. As he moved forward with the outlaw into the light, he snapped an order at Bob. "Put up that gun. You've done enough harm for one night."

"War's over— till tomorrow, Bob," Searcy added. "You can put up your hardware, but keep it right handy for later use." He stared at Lee. "The other twin, I reckon. You're certainly some similar."

"What started this?" Lee asked his brother.

"Five of them jumped me this morning. I got away. Later this man Cherokee served word he would kill me before night."

Linton and Ransom lifted the dead man's body to the sidewalk. Later it was carried on a door to a poolroom. The brothers walked into the hotel with Searcy and Kinney. Lee did not reproach Bob for what he had done, though he knew it would not have occurred if his advice had been taken. To say, "I told you so," would do no good. He had arrived too late. Bob could not go into the rangers now. Lieutenant Hall would feel that he was too friendly with the Searcy gang, even if it could be made clear to him that the boy had been defending himself in this instance.

"We had better get out of here tonight before there is any more trouble," Lee said.

"Get out and go where?" Bob asked.

"I don't know. This is a wide country. Some place where we aren't known."

"What good would that do?" Bob wanted to know. "My name would be in the Rangers' little book. Yours, too, maybe. About the time we were getting started in something they would find us. I'm on the wrong side of the law now."

"Bob is right," Searcy confirmed. "Dave Hallett is strong with those in political power. He would see the Rangers were given orders to hunt Bob down. Fact is, he is safer here than he would be most places. We have a pretty strong organization and old Mose lays off of us. He finds it pays him not to crowd us."

This did not suit Lee at all. If Bob stayed, it would have to be as a member of the Searcy gang. There would be no safety for him unless he was one of them. No solution of the difficulty could be worse than that.

"We don't have to stay in Texas," Lee urged. "Arizona is a new country just opening up. We could go there."

Bob's mouth set obstinately. "I'm going to stay in Texas—right here in this county. The Circle Lazy H took my cattle up near Dodge. I'm going to get back as many as they took, and some more for interest."

"Sounds reasonable," Searcy said, slanting an inquiring look at Lee. "I'd feel that way myself."

"No," Lee said stoutly. "Bob is an honest man. He can't do that."

"Why can't I?" Bob demanded. "They took my cows. I take their stuff. Even steven. What's dishonest about that?"

Lee fought hard to get his brother to see this right, but he knew soon that he was arguing a lost cause. Bob had made up his mind, and no appeal could change his decision.

They talked till late. Lee stayed at the hotel that night. After he had gone to bed

he found it impossible to sleep. He lay staring at the ceiling, desperately unhappy, marshaling his points for use again in the morning.

When morning came Bob was more determined than ever. The Circle Lazy H had driven him to this. He would stay and fight it out with the ranch. Why fuss about it? There wasn't any other place to go where he would be safe. Moreover, Lee had not got himself into the kind of jam he had. At San Antonio he could find work and nobody would molest him. Lieutenant Hall would probably be glad to have him in the Rangers.

"And after you are in the force you can come out here and arrest me again," Duke said cheerfully.

"Again?" Lee quizzed.

Searcy explained that he had been arrested several times by McNelly and Hall. He had good friends who went bond for him and he was always free within a few hours.

"What about the indictments?"

"They kind of pile up, but there isn't much done about them," Duke grinned. "Texas isn't like Ohio and New England."

Later Lee learned that what Searcy had said was literally true. In the hands of the officials were indictments against him charging theft, highway robbery, and murder, but nobody seemed to be interested in pushing them. Most of those entrusted with law enforcement in the counties where Duke Searcy operated found it safer to wink at his depredations.

BOB was concerned lest his brother be attacked on his way to the Nueces, either on his own account or in mistake for him. Duke offered to guide him through the brush as far as the river. Lee would have preferred to go alone, but he yielded to Bob's urging. He left Carrizo with a heavy heart. His brother was starting to go bad, and there was nothing he could do about it.

Searcy struck into the brush at once, following a creek bordered by pecan trees, huisache, and wild grapes. He found his companion in a silent depressed mood.

"You are worrying about your brother," Duke charged.

"Yes," Lee admitted. "He is starting the wrong way. I feel like a deserter in leaving him."

"I'll try to see no harm comes to him."

"You mean you will see he does not get shot if you can help it."

"Yes."

"That isn't the worst harm that could come to him." Lee looked straight at the outlaw, a challenge in his eyes. "Bob comes of decent honorable folks. What I'm afraid of most of all is that he will sink down and become a thief and a bandit."

"Like I am," Duke suggested, very gently.

"Like they say you are," Lee corrected.

Searcy's eyes met those of the other and held fast for a long time. At last the rigor in them relaxed and he laughed. "I might get mad, but I won't. I am an outlaw. No denying that. But old man Hallett is a respected citizen. He skulked out of fighting in the war. He stole the stock of those at the front. When they came home and made him too much trouble he hired killers to bump them off. Now he is a member of the church and influential at Austin with the governor and the legislature.

"The difference between him and me is that I do my own killing and he pays to get his done. Just the same that old vinegaroon is a bigger skunk any day of the week than I am."

Lee did not argue that. Even if true, this did not excuse Searcy. It was like the point he had heard made that there were worse people outside of the penitentiary than in prison.

The outlaw brought Chase out of the brush at the Nueces ford.

"You'll be all right now," Searcy promised. His eyes lit to laughter. "You can start bragging that you called Duke Searcy

a thief and a bandit and he didn't do a thing about it."

Lee grinned at him. This man was undoubtedly a bad character, both a killer and a robber, but there was an engaging quality about his personality. Nearly everybody who met him liked him.

"No, sir, I can't even peep about it," he said. "If I did, all those who heard me would decide I was a boasting liar."

"I've killed men for saying less to me than you did," Duke admitted. "You've got sand in yore craw. I'll say that. Both you and Bob. He might have waited behind the fence for Cherokee to come forward, but he stepped right out into the open. Something about you boys I like, even if you are Yanks."

"Bob is game and he is square," his brother explained. "But he is easily led by somebody he likes. And he is headed for trouble. Six months from now he may do things that would shock him today. You're right when you say I'm terribly worried about him."

Searcy shook his head. "No sense in that. Bet you that five years from now Bob is a respectable rancher. Fact is, I'm thinking of reforming myself. I have a girl, and she is scared about my wild ways. So long, fellow."

The outlaw vanished into the brush.

On the frontier from his youth, Lee had met more than one "bad man" who attempted to reshape their lives and found it impossible. This was especially true if they had gained reputations as killers. Men feared them, distrusted them, were jealous of the notoriety they had gained. In the end they could not escape from the reputations they had built up.

CHAPTER XIII

MARY MAY SAYS THANKS

WHEN Lee dropped in on Lieutenant "Red" Hall he found that the ranger had heard from Austin and been authorized to add a few men to his company. He said he would take both brothers.

This put Lee in an embarrassing situation. He explained that Bob was no longer available.

"Has he got another job?" Hall asked.

"He's up in Dimmit County—getting interested in a cattle spread."

"He'd better stay away from there," the ranger advised. "Duke Searcy will steal him blind."

Lee knew there was no use concealing information. He told the story of how Bob had been forced to kill Cherokee. In the course of it his connection with Duke Searcy came out.

"Just as well you told me," Hall commented. "I would have known all about it inside of two days anyhow. If he has thrown in with Searcy's gang we don't want him. Under the circumstances I'm not sure we want you."

He postponed a decision, but later in the day sent word to Lee that he would like to see him. He had decided to accept his application.

They discussed equipment. The Rangers did not wear a uniform. But a sound horse and a modern revolver were necessary.

As Lee was leaving, Hall told him to come round again about five o'clock. They had been invited to supper.

"Where?" Lee asked.

"Never mind where. Wear your Sunday-go-to-meetings. There will be ladies present."

Lee was surprised. He was not what was known as a ladies' man, and he was shy of going into strange mixed company. But this did not seem to be the best time to decline an invitation from his new superior officer.

He showed up on time, quite well aware that he looked better in his every-day clothes. The collar of his "boiled" shirt cramped the freedom of his brown throat. He felt as if he were going to an important funeral.

Lieutenant Hall had a buggy hitched to

the rack in front of the office. He drove out of the business section into a residence neighborhood and came to a street on the brow of a hill where the houses were more expensive than any they had yet seen. In front of the largest one of these he drew up. It was colonial in design, a veritable mansion.

Lee wondered what they were doing here. He was a little disturbed, but he said nothing. An old black Negro, with grizzled hair around a bald brown head, opened the door for them and led the way to a large drawing room more richly furnished than any other he had ever entered. The chandelier suspended from the ceiling, with its scores of crystal pendants, was elaborately ornamental. Most of the furniture had been imported from England and was in the best Victorian style. There must have been half a dozen large mirrors, and as many cabinets of mahogany, teakwood, and walnut filled with treasures of one kind or another. At the far end of the room there was a fireplace of Italian marble.

Into the room came Kirk Jackson. He shook hands with them both. To Lee he said, "Glad to see you here at last, boy, even if the only way of getting you is to have a ranger drag you to the house."

Hall chuckled. "He didn't know where we were coming."

"Or you wouldn't have come?" the old Confederate asked Lee, a little belligerently. "That the way of it?"

"I've been out of town," Lee explained. "Just got back."

The old Negro butler came into the room carrying a tray with mint juleps on it. Lee shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Colonel," he said. "I don't drink."

His host glared at him, face a mottled purple. Not drink a mint julep made according to the old Jackson formula. He gulped, to restrain words that under the circumstances he must not use. At that moment he would have given a thousand dollars if somebody except this puritantic damn-Yank had saved his daughter from being gored.

"This isn't a drink," he explained, after achieving coherence. "The way Uncle Pike fixes a mint julep it is nectar—ambrosia—food for the gods."

Lee flushed. He stood very stiff and embarrassed. "I'm sorry. It's a matter of principle with me. I promised—"

Mary May had come into the room. She guessed that her father was about to explode and would be sorry for it later. Moving swiftly across the room, she took the glass from Lee.

"If it's such wonderful food I'll drink it myself," she said, and raised the glass, smiling saucily at the outraged colonel. "Here's to the Lees and the Jacksons, a good Southern toast, and it takes in all of us."

The girl's father glared at her. "You put that drink down, Mary May. I declare I don't know what I'll do with you. In my time young girls were ladylike. You know d-d—very well mint juleps are for men. I'll have to send you off to a seminary if you don't quit acting so bold."

She put the glass down on an onyx-topped table and curtsied demurely to her parent. But there were bubbles of laughter in her eyes. "And I try so hard to model myself on you," she murmured.

Lieutenant Hall laughed. "Two of us will drink then, Colonel, and two won't," he said. "I'll guarantee the extra julep won't go to waste. We'll drink your toast,

Miss Mary May. The Jacksons and the Lees! May we know one another better and like what we know."

AFTER supper Mary May showed Lee Chase some of the art knick-knacks in the cabinets which they had picked up in France and Italy two years before. Europe was to him almost as far away as the moon, and it was amazing to realize that this slim girl had walked the streets of Paris and drifted in a gondola down the canals of Venice.

Except for an Englishman and a German immigrant he had met in Kansas, he had never seen anybody who had traveled in the old world.

He knew she was more friendly in manner to him than she would otherwise have been because her father could not bring himself to like the Yankee. He sensed that she was really shy. The apparent boldness of the mint julep episode had its inception in an urge to divert her father's irascibility from him. There was not, he felt sure, a girl under heaven daintier or lovelier than this one.

"I met your brother," she told him, "and mistook him for you." She laughed. "I fancy he has had more experience with girls than most young men of his age."

"More than I have had," he agreed. "When we went to dances I hung around the door with the other boys and Bob danced with the prettiest girls."

"You look very much alike, but you are really not so at all."

"Aren't we? I don't know. He has a lot more go than I have."

"I thought you had a good deal the first moment I saw you," she said, and for a moment let her violet eyes rest on his. "I haven't ever thanked you properly. I can't."

In the days that followed, most of them spent on horseback on the prairies or in the brush, that long shy look disturbed him a good deal.

It gave him another high moment to think about, one during which for one heartbeat barriers were down.

Mary May led the way back to the end of the room where her father and Hall were seated.

"Sure as you're a foot high, Hall, there's going to be trouble on the Nueces," the colonel was saying, excitement in his voice.

The red-headed officer grinned. "There is always trouble there—always will be till Searcy is wiped out."

"Sure enough," Jackson agreed. "That scalawag is a pain. You know what the scoundrel did the other day." The old Confederate laughed reminiscently. "He put a sign-post at one fork of a public road, a road used by the Circle Lazy H to get to Carrizo. It said: 'This is Duke Searcy's road. Take the other.' Old Dave Hallett liked to of had a fit."

"Does Searcy get as far north as your country?" Hall asked, after an appreciative grin at the outlaw's audacity.

"Yes. Uvalde is one of his hang-outs. I reckon he has lifted a lot of stock from the range on the Frio. But I have never been able to prove him guilty of taking my stuff even though I have been morally certain."

"Even when you can prove him guilty it does no good to arrest him," the ranger said. "There are three indictments for murder against him, and the officers of the counties where they occurred daren't bring him to trial."

"Instead of arresting him, why don't you rub him out? Up in Wyoming they call it dry-gulching."

"We are supposed to represent law," Hall mentioned.

"And Duke Searcy is not the only pest, even including his big gang of bandits. There are still cattlemen ready to steal. Why does Hallett keep a bunch of murdering gunmen on his place if he is playing a straight game?"

"He claims it is on account of Searcy."

The colonel thumped the table with a heavy fist. "I don't believe it. He's just

as big a thief as Searcy, but he covers up like the hypocrite he is."

"They say up in Dodge that he is one of the few trail drivers who don't bring in a clean herd*," Chase said.

"This young man had a run-in with the boss of one of his trail herds at Dodge," Hall told the ranchman.

Lee looked at the ranger officer in surprise. "Who told you that?"

Hall laughed. "You weren't putting anything over on me, young fellow. I wired to Sheriff Masterson and got an answer.

"He said you would do to tie to, and that a letter would follow. The letter came today. He told me all about the trouble you and your brother had with the Circle Lazy H boys. Masterson gives you a clean bill of health. He says it was a case of absolute self-defense when you killed Tom Dobie."

Mary May was shocked. She stared at her guest out of big troubled eyes.

"That is true," Lee said gravely. "Five or six of them jumped me. I had to fight my way out of a trap."

His host looked at him with more respect. Maybe this Yank might not be such a milksop after all. "Tell me about it," he said.

Lee told the story briefly, shielding his brother as far as he could.

"Just like the Circle Lazy H warriors," the colonel snorted. "They hunt trouble wherever they go. Right soon there is going to be war in Georgia between old Dave and Duke Searcy. I can feel it coming. It would be a fine thing for the honest men of West Texas if they would wipe each other out, the whole kit and caboodle of them."

Lee was disturbed by this prediction. He knew that if such a feud broke into the open his brother would be in the thick of it.

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*A clean herd was one with no strays in it belonging to other cattlemen that would not later be paid for.

CHAPTER XIV

CARRYING LAW INTO THE MESQUITE

LEE CHASE did not like the .50 caliber Sharps carbine supplied by the state to the rangers. It heated and was not accurate except at close range. He bought a center fire Winchester carbine, caliber .44. This cost him fifty dollars, but it was a first class weapon, recommended by Lieutenant Hall, some of whose men had carried it for years.

Hall broke his company into detachments, one of which was sent along the San Saba to Menard County where a band of thieves had been operating. Chase was in this squad, under the command of Sergeant Brown. They camped for a few days in the cabins three miles from Menardville which had been built by Captain Roberts' company of rangers three or four years prior to this time. The station had been put up to protect settlers against the raids of the Kiowas and Comanches. So effective had been the work of Roberts that the Indians were no longer a menace.

The members of the company were very young men, filled with energy and high spirits, and almost every day they played practical jokes on one another. Lee was awakened the morning after their arrival at Menardville by a cry of "Fire! Fire!" Three or four of his companions rushed into the cabin carrying buckets of water which they flung over him as he was rising from the cot. There was nothing to do but take it with a grin and decide to even the score. That evening Lee wrapped some powder in a rag and climbed noiselessly to the roof of the cabin where his tormentors were sitting before an open fire. When the powder reached the flames and exploded, the bucket brigade made a wild dash for the door. From the roof Lee inquired placidly, "What's the hurry, boys? Is there another fire?"

The rangers were outdoor men, happier in a camp with no roof over their heads.

The sergeant moved them to one in a pecan grove on the river bank. In the San Saba were plenty of yellow catfish weighing twenty pounds or more which could be caught on trot lines. Wild turkeys and spiked deer were abundant. Lee had time to do a good deal of hunting and fishing.

After evidence had been gathered the thieves were captured without much trouble and turned over to the sheriff. Next day Sergeant Brown met at Menardville a messenger from Lieutenant Hall with instructions to move into Kimble County and arrest Dick Richards, his younger brother Buck, and their running mate Joe Ford. All three of them were wanted for murder and were on the dodge.

Old Noah Richards, the father of the two brothers, had a ranch on the South Llano River. He was a hard character himself, and all his many sons were turbulent and lawless. While riding on the Nueces for the Circle Lazy H, Dick Richards and Joe Ford had shot down a storekeeper at Carrizo. Since the killing had been completely without justification, the murderers had hit the trail for old Noah's place where they would have friends to protect them.

The tangled chaparral of Kimble County, thick with cedar, pecan, and mesquite brush, offered excellent hiding places, and the rivers and hills would furnish fish and game for food. Because the *mesquitals* along the South Llano were among the most dense in the state there were many outlaws holed up in them.

The rangers camped on the north branch of the Llano and started scouting at once for the men they wanted. During the first week they picked up three men listed in the crime book and turned them over to local officers. Though Brown was convinced that the three he had been sent to get were lying low in the brush, he could find nobody who would admit having seen them. Those questioned were either friendly to the fugitives or afraid of their vengeance if they talked. Over the night campfire the sergeant talked the situation over with his men.

"My guess is that they are cached somewhere near the old man's ranch," he said. "What do you think, Ballard?"

The question was addressed to a ranger who had been brought up in the district.

"I reckon they're hiding not five miles from old Noah's place," Ballard answered. "Probably they never show up there except at night, but I'll bet my boots they get home two-three times a week for supplies."

"Of course they set a lookout while they are there," Lee suggested, "but we might trap them in spite of that."

"No use trying to comb the brush for them," another said.

Lee proposed a plan. It was that they ride over to the Richards place in the afternoon and search it. They would comb the place and learn nothing, after which they would depart disappointed. Old Noah would send word to his sons of the rangers' visit, and the outlaws would come home to get the story of the raid, not looking for a second visit on the same day. If the rangers were lucky they might bag their game.

Brown was a long rangy man with a hawk nose projecting from a thin dark face. He scowled into the mesquite fire for several seconds before he made up his mind.

"All right. We'll take a shot at it." He had been drying his wet boots before the fire, examining them carefully from time to time to prevent scorching of the leather. Now he pulled them on. "I'm going to turn in, boys."

It was about mid-afternoon when the rangers reached the Richards place. While they were still a hundred yards from the long one-story log house they noticed a boy scurry across the open and disappear into the house. A man came to the front door and stood there, rifle in hand. He watched silently as Brown swung from the saddle and moved toward him.

"Noah Richards?" the sergeant asked.

"That's my name." The thin lips of the settler shut tight. He was a small man, in ragged old jeans and a torn shirt. His face was sun-toughened and wrinkled, and out of it peered small faded blue eyes, sullen and sly. His age Lee guessed at sixty.

"Is your son Dick at home?"

"I wouldn't know," Richards answered. "He doesn't live around here."

A younger man showed up at the corner of the barn fifty yards away. He too was carrying a rifle.

"He might be visiting you," Brown said. "If you don't mind we'll take a look about the place."

"And if I do mind?" the ranchman snarled.

The ranger smiled pleasantly. "We'll take the look just the same." He glanced toward his men. "Come on, boys."

All of them dismounted except one who stayed to take care of the horses.

"You got a search warrant?" demanded Richards.

"Rangers don't use search warrants." Brown moved forward. He had told his men to wait there for him.

The old man barred the way stiffly until the ranger was not more than three yards distant, then came to a decision.

"All right," he snapped. "You can look. You won't find him." The harsh hostility still stared out of the weasely face. If the owner gave way, it was defiantly.

Brown brushed past him into the house. He paid no attention to a boy of about fifteen standing in the hall, though he noticed that there was a revolver in the lad's hand.

There were four rooms altogether, and none of the men he wanted were in any of them. He had not expected to find them.

"We'll mosey over to the barn," the sergeant said. "You come with us, Richards. You won't need that rifle. Leave it here."

The ranchman handed the weapon to his son and led the way to the barn. The young man with the rifle met them at the door.

His father spoke to him while they were still some steps away. "These men are rangers, Pete. Seems they are lookin' for Dick. They are hell bent on searching the place. That's all right with me. Far as I know Dick is a hundred miles and more from here."

The rangers tooth-combed the barn and the root house. They rode up and down the creek and pushed through the willows. It would not do to make a too casual search. After a time Sergeant Brown gave up. Before he rode away he made a half-apology to Noah.

"Sorry if we have annoyed you," he said, and smiled. "But that's what we are paid for. We have to go through the motions."

"I hope you're satisfied," Noah Richards growled.

The sergeant was satisfied, at least of one thing, that old Noah could take him directly to his son's hiding place if he wanted to do it.

They rode down the road for a mile and turned into the brush. Presently they struck a small stream and followed it to the river. Here they threw off the saddles and picketed the horses. A fire was lit and coffee prepared. They lounged on the ground and ate the sandwiches they had brought with them. Dusk came, and presently darkness. The mosquitoes hummed about them. Occasionally when the pests lit on a face the slap of a hand could be heard.

THE stars were out when the rangers saddled again. Ballard led them through the chaparral back to the Richards place. A quarter of a mile from the house the sergeant divided his men into two squads. One was instructed to circle around the ranch and spread out along the back pasture fence. Lee was in this group. The others were going to charge the house from the front. If the outlaws were in

the house they would probably make for their horses and try to escape through the pasture.

Brown and his men came out of the darkness to a low rail fence built to keep hogs out of the yard. They sailed over it without stopping. A sentry shouted a warning, took a hurried shot at the horsemen, and raced for the cottonwoods. The riders paid no heed to him. From the house came cries of alarm, the stamp of hurried feet, the crash of an exploding gun.

The rangers did not enter the house. The sergeant and one of his troopers circled it. The other two dismounted and covered the front door.

Four men, racing for their mounts, were already close to the rack near the stable. They pulled the slip knots of the bridles and swung to the saddles, backs and arms working as they jumped the horses to a gallop. A sorrel went down in the jam and flung its rider. He scrambled to his feet and ran into the barn. The two rangers let the other three go and went into the stable after him.

The mounted outlaws pounded across the pasture to the gate. As one of them was opening it, Ballard rode out of the brush. The guns of the escaping men drummed at him. A slug struck him in the shoulder, but he answered their fire when they passed him in their dash for the chaparral. Lee came along the fence fast and plunged into the brush after them. He heard the sounds of another ranger at his heels crashing through the thicket.

Branches of mesquite and huisache whipped his face and he could taste the trickling blood on his lips. A heavy limb against which he dashed almost swept him out of the saddle. But he guessed the outlaws were having hard going too. He could hear one of them just ahead.

His bronco tore down the bank of a wash, plowed through the sand, and went up the opposite bank like a climbing cat. The man in front of him swung sharply to the left. By the crashing of the bushes Lee guessed he was not thirty yards away. The ranger covered his face with one arm and lay low in the saddle to protect himself from young willows flogging him. He had lost contact with his companions, and he guessed that the man he was following was also out of touch with his friends.

Beyond the willows was a cactus-covered flat, very rough and uneven. Lee's horse gained at every stride. The fellow he was pursuing had lost his hat. Looking back, he fired over his shoulder at Chase. The bullet ripped through a prickly pear to the right of the ranger.

Lee did not take time to shoot. The nose of his buckskin was almost up to the shoulders of the other horse. He slid the carbine from its place beside the saddle and brought the barrel down on the bare head of the outlaw. The body of the man slumped. Before they had covered a dozen yards more he pitched out of the saddle. Dragging his mount to a halt, Lee flung himself to the ground and ran back.

The man he had knocked out lay lax, arms and legs sprawling, face down. He turned the body over, and was astonished at what he saw. His captive was Linton, one of the foremen of the Circle Lazy H outfit.

CHAPTER XV

DRAGGING MISCREANTS OUT OF THE BRUSH

WHEN Lee reached the ranch, bringing a prisoner with his hands tied behind him, he found Sergeant Brown bandaging the wounded leg of Joe Ford. He had been shot while resisting arrest. Old Noah Richards, his three younger sons, and a pair of ranch hangers-on, were all grouped together in front of the house under guard of two rangers.

Ford was wasting a good deal of bad language cursing the rangers in general and Brown in particular. He was fright-

ened as well as angry. Just as likely as not he would lose his leg, he complained bitterly. The sergeant promised to get him a wooden one if he did, so that he would be able to hobble up the steps to the gallows all right.

Lee's prisoner demanded angrily of Brown what he meant by sending his ruffians to ride after peaceable citizens and knock them down with their guns.

The officer rose from his job of first aid. He looked over the man at length, noting the light cold eyes in the leathery brown face, observing that his hair was clotted with blood and his face stained by it.

"Who is this man?" he inquired of Lee.

The new ranger gave information. His name was Linton, and he was a foreman of the Circle Lazy H Ranch. With a crowd of his riders he had tried to kill Bob Chase. Lee did not know what he was doing here, since the only time he had seen him before had been at Carrizo, but he did know that the fellow had shot at him before he slammed a rifle barrel against his head.

"Is there any law against my being here or any other place I want to be?" Linton wanted to know harshly. "You won't find my name in yore crime book, and you can't prove a thing against me. Why shouldn't I shoot at a scalawag chasing me hell-for-leather with a gun in his hand?"

Lee did not take the trouble to explain that he had no weapon in his hand, since he probably would have had one ready for action if he had not been so busy fighting his way through brush.

"Dick Richards and Joe Ford worked for your outfit at the time they killed Gowan, didn't they?" the sergeant said.

"I wasn't there when Gowan was killed, so I don't know who did it," Linton retorted.

"Plenty of others know. Four or five witnesses were there. You knew these men went on the dodge after the murder. What are you doing here with them?"

"That's my business," Linton flung back hardily. "If you've got anything against me, arrest me. If not, shut up yore trap."

"Good. We'll hold you till we know more about you, Mr. Linton. Meanwhile you had better let me tie up your head."

But Linton preferred to have Noah Richards look after his wound, which suited Brown very well. The sergeant had a second patient waiting. Ballard and another ranger had just ridden in across the pasture. The wounded shoulder needed attention.

Fortunately nobody had been killed in the mêlée, though there had been plenty of bloodshed. Two of the combatants carried bullet wounds, one a broken head, and at least three others had faces scratched and torn in half a dozen places.

The two Richards had escaped, but the raid had netted two prisoners, one of them at least very much wanted by the law. There was a five-hundred-dollar reward out for Ford. Maybe Linton would have to be released later, though Lee was of opinion that he was here on nefarious business and if turned loose now would have to be re-arrested at some subsequent date.

Brown commandeered a wagon and one of the Richards' boys to drive it. He filled the bed with hay and put the three wounded men and a guard in it. Over a rough and bumpy road they traveled through the night to their camp on the North Llano. The gray light of pre-dawn

was beginning to sift into the sky before they reached it.

While two of the rangers prepared a breakfast of coffee, cornbread, and smoked ham, Sergeant Brown did his best to make the injured men comfortable. His father was a doctor at Houston, and he had studied medicine under his direction for a year. Many a practicing doctor in the Border states knew less about the human anatomy and the use of drugs than this ranger. His patients were stoics. Even Ford, though he had exploded into profanity at first, had endured with tight-shut lips the constant jolting of the wagon as the wheels dropped into chuck holes. The code of the frontier demanded that a wounded man bear pain without a murmur.

After breakfast a guard was set and the rest of the rangers dropped into immediate deep sleep. Not until noon did the camp wake to life again.

Brown sent his prisoners to Austin in the wagon. With them went an escort of four troopers. Ballard declined to go with them for medical treatment. He said that Doctor Brown suited him and that inside of a week he would be as good as new.

A few days after this a settler, one not friendly to the outlaws, told Ballard that the Richards boys, Dick and Buck, had decamped from the neighborhood. He did not know where they had gone.

It was probable that fear of the rangers had driven them away, but Lee had a feeling that Linton had something to do with their going. There was a possibility that the sub-foreman of the Circle Lazy H had run foul of the law and had come to Kimble County to hide. Lee did not think so. His opinion was that he had come to see the young outlaws as a representative of the ranch, though what he wanted with them he could not guess.

Within a day or two word came from Lieutenant Hall that the detachment was to report immediately at San Antonio.

CHAPTER XVI

HELL BREAKS LOOSE IN GEORGIA

THERE was trouble on the Nueces, as Colonel Jackson had predicted. The outlaws had flung down a challenge to Dave Hallett by cutting his fences and driving away a hundred head of cattle. They had done it in the dark of the moon, so cleverly that no hide nor hair of the stolen stock could be found. It was known that thieves had pastures hidden deep in the brush where herds could be kept until it was safe to drive them to the Devil's River country from which they could be sent north to Kansas after having been rebranded. But few men who had suffered depredations dared hunt for their cows in that wide stretch of chaparral the raiders had appropriated for their own. Two intrepid ranchmen had cut sign and followed the trail into the mesquite, and neither of them had been seen again.

Since Colonel Jackson had a large ranch on the Nueces and was very familiar with the situation Lieutenant Hall talked it over with him. Lee was present at the conference. The ranger officer had taken him because he knew Duke Searcy and had recently been to Carrizo.

The ex-Confederate was full of the subject. "Old Dave Hallett and Duke Searcy have every decent man in that country side-stepping—except maybe old Judge Fallon," the colonel exploded. "Both are thorough villains, though I will say that Searcy is far the bolder of the two. He doesn't care a Mexican *peso* what anybody knows about him, while Dave wants to make out that he is a good respectable citizen. For a hundred miles east and west of the Nueces you can't find a nickel's worth of law. No officer can lift a hand against those scoundrels. Hell's bells! The sheriff of Maverick County doesn't dare sleep in his own house because he arrested a couple of Searcy's men once."

Red Hall laughed. "I've heard you blow

off considerable steam, Colonel. They don't seem to have you too scared yet."

"Me, I say what I think," Jackson told him. "I'm a little too well known for either of them to tackle, though when I'm out at the ranch I always have a gun handy, asleep or awake. Searcy is impudent as the devil when we meet. Comes grinning up to me and hopes the grass is good and my stock doing well, though he knows I know he would steal me blind if he could. Old Dave hates me plenty. I've called the turn on him too often before important people when he wanted to impress them."

"There have been three-four killings out there lately," Hall said, "all of them friends of Searcy or Circle Lazy H men."

"That's fine," the colonel boomed. "It would be good for the country if about twelve on each side were rubbed out."

"I daresay you are right," Hall agreed dryly. "But if I'm going to hold my job I think I had better drift in and interfere with their activities a little. Up in Austin they seem to prefer that rangers do any killing that has to be done, though for my part I hope we do as little as possible."

Lee Chase met Rip Burnett wandering down St. Mary's Street. The cowboy grinned and slapped him on the back.

"The other half of the twins," he cried. "You're the doggondest pair I ever did see. Linton got back to the ranch just before I left. He claims you waylaid him and most beat his brains out."

"Linton is a prejudiced party," Lee suggested. "See anything of my brother since I was in Carrizo?"

"Yes, sir. He trails with Duke Searcy. Seems to be his right bower. I ain't supposed to speak to either of you boys except to cuss you out and then shoot holes in you. But Dave Hallett doesn't own me by a jugful. I'm not one of his warriors. He hired me to chouse cows."

"Glad to hear it." Lee gave no sign that the news just given him of his brother was distressing to him. He probed for more information. "There has been quite a little trouble lately between your outfit and Searcy's gang, I'm told."

"You bet, and there will be more."

"Both sides on the prod? Hell bent for war?"

"You've done said it, brother. This has been getting ready to bust for years. When any of us meet Searcy's men we walk around each other like strange bulldogs bristling for a fight. Me, I don't like it. I'm a peaceable guy, till someone drives me into a corner. Why wouldn't there be trouble, with Searcy cutting out our stuff and driving it away whenever the notion takes him?"

"Any particular reason why all this killing has started just now?" Lee asked.

Rip looked at him, a sly grin on his face. "That's a funny thing for you to ask, fellow. The fracus you twins had with our trail drivers in Dodge started the fireworks."

"But Searcy wasn't in that."

"No, but he and yore brother are thick as thieves now." Rip corrected himself, not to give offense. "I mean thick as sidekicks. Duke is backing Bob against the Circle Lazy H. I drove Old Man Hallett and Terry into town." He lowered his voice, though there was nobody near. "They're cooking up something against Duke Searcy. I wouldn't know just what."

CHASE reported to the lieutenant what the cowboy had told him. Hall decided at once to have a talk with Hallett. The ranchman and his foreman were probably staying at the Menger Lee, the ranger captain took with him.

"Red" Hall was a long blond man with rippling muscles under perfect control. As he walked up the street to the Alamo Plaza, men could have noticed about his movements a certain pantherish litheness. His personality was dynamic, with an enormous amount of drive to it. United to his fearlessness, this made him a notable figure in West Texas. Desperados feared

him, and good citizens felt that the law was safe in his hands.

THE dark liquid eyes of two Mexican chili girls followed the rangers across the plaza to the Menger. Even in Texas men who carried themselves like these two were rare.

Mr. Hallett and Mr. Terry, the clerk said, had just gone into the *patio.* The rangers stepped into the garden and moved down a palm-bordered walk. There were orange trees among the flowers, and a bougainvillea vine climbing to the second floor gallery opening from the rooms. At a far corner they found two men looking down into a pool where several large alligators sunned themselves on a shelf.

The older of the two was a small man with a sharp foxlike face from which gleamed black beady eyes. He had a straight thin-lipped mouth that reminded Lee of a steel trap.

Hall said to him, with a smiling nod at the saurians, "If one of these blinking reptiles down there could take a good crunch at Duke Searcy you would have a worry less, wouldn't you, Mr. Hallett?"

The owner of the Circle Lazy H turned on Hall, obsidian eyes cold as the waters of a frozen lake. "You a friend of Searcy?" he snapped.

"Not so you could notice it," Hall answered. "I've arrested him twice. I'm Hall of the Rangers."

"That so? I've been wanting to see you, to find out what you mean to do about wiping out that killer Searcy. No use arresting him.

"His friends turn him loose. Shoot him full of holes. The ruffians who follow him will understand that."

Terry's flinty eyes, cold and shallow, had been fixed on Chase. The foreman was a large powerful man, arrogant and rough. He stood six foot three, with not a superfluous ounce of flesh on his hard body. Well past forty, he had not begun to run to fat. He had thickened but not softened. Across his flat stomach lay a steel band of muscle.

"Arrest this man," he ordered Hall. "He is wanted for murder in Kansas."

Hall looked at him, a hint of insolent interest in his cool glance. "Particulars, please," the lieutenant said.

"He shot down one of my men in Dodge City. This fellow and his brother are bad men of the worst kind."

"And the authorities in Dodge want him sent back?" Hall asked.

"It would save time to turn him over to me to see that he did no more killing."

"I asked a question, Mr. Terry," the ranger officer mentioned.

"Sure he's wanted. He ought to be in yore crime book."

From his pocket Hall drew an envelope. Out of the envelope he took a letter. This he handed to the foreman. It was the letter sent him by Bat Masterson about the Chase-Circle Lazy H shootings at Dodge.

"The sheriff doesn't agree with you, Mr. Terry. His story is that Lee Chase was jumped by five or six of your men, that he had to run for his life while they were firing at him, that he took refuge in a lumber yard, and in escaping, still with Circle Lazy H guns blazing at him, he was forced to kill one of his attackers."

Hallett took the letter from his foreman and read it. He lifted his thin upper lip in a sneer. "Same old story. Those damn Yanks stand together against Texans every time. I could of told you what a Kansas sheriff would say when one of our boys was killed by some of the riff-raff of a trail end town."

"I've heard of Sheriff Masterson," Hall demurred. "He has the reputation of being a good fair officer."

"He is a good officer," Lee Chase said, speaking for the first time. "Not a man in Dodge would condemn me for what I did, nor would any just man in San Antonio. The trail men had me trapped. I had to kill or be killed. It was one or the other."

"I want this man arrested, Hall," flung out Hallett angrily.

"You'll have to give me better evidence than you have shown before I'll arrest one of my own rangers," the officer replied.

"This fellow one of yore rangers?" snarled Terry. "Why, his brother is a killer, too. Not counting all the other men he may have bumped off, he killed two of my men, one in Dodge and one at Carrizo. Goddlemighty, man, he's with Duke Fisher right now rustling our stuff, one of his right bower assassins."

"We're not discussing his brother," Hall observed. "I reckon I'll get to him one of these days if what you say is correct. This boy, Lee Chase, isn't a rustler. He's a ranger, and already he has done good work on the Llano."

"He 'most killed my man Linton, who was up there tending to his own business," Hallett rasped harshly. "Is that the kind of fellow you choose for rangers, bully-puss outlaws on the dodge? I'll speak to my friend the governor about that."

"Hop to it," advised Hall. He did not lift his voice, but in it there was a cool hard challenge. "You'll have to hurry. I'm leaving for Carrizo this week."

"To get Duke Searcy?" Hallett inquired. He had already been in communication with the governor, urging that rangers be sent to Dimmit County to clean out the outlaws.

"Searcy and anybody else that is breaking the law."

"You'll find plenty of them," the ranchman said, with a bark of splenetic laughter.

"So I have been told," Hall agreed, his gaze full on the fox-face of the old man. "I called on you to see if you can give me any useful information."

"I can give you bucketsfull," Hallett snorted. "Glad to have you stay on my ranch while you are in Dimmit County. I'll put some line cabins at the service of you and your men."

"No, thanks," vetoed the officer. "We'll stay in or near Carrizo. Much obliged for the offer, though."

"If you were on the place it would be handier," suggested the ranch owner. "My men could work with you to wipe out these scoundrels."

Hall shook his red head. "No. The rangers play a lone hand. If there is any trouble we'll take care of it without help. All I'll need from you is information. What I want is the story of the facts."

The old man was annoyed, but he did not say so. What he really wanted was a body of rangers who would act on advice given by him. A friend of the administration ought to have some privileges. But he made no verbal protest. The four men sat down in the *patio* and talked for an hour; at least three of them talked, Hallett a great deal, his foreman not so much, Lieutenant Hall chiefly in the form of questions. Lee Chase did not speak three sentences from start to finish.

While the ranchman and the ranger were discussing the date of the start to Carrizo, Terry drew Lee aside and turned hard frosty eyes on him.

"You are a fine pair of four-flushers, you and yore brother," he jeered. "He hides behind a woman and you behind the guns of the rangers. But don't get the wrong idea, fellow. We'll get you sure as summer follows spring. You and him both."

Lee nodded, casually. "You'll have to do better than you've been doing. Your hired gunmen don't seem to live up to expectations."

He turned on his heel and then walked away.

CHAPTER XVII

"WHEN FREE-BORN MEN SPEAK FREE"

THE hot summer day was wearing into late afternoon. Not for years had Carrizo been so filled with tense activity. All morning men had drifted in on horseback

—from the mesquite, thickets of the Nueces, from the Espantosa country, from the Circle Lazy H and small ranches. For there was to be a preliminary test of strength between the feudists. Sheriff Gadsden's posse had surprised Brad Kinney and arrested him for the recent killing of one of Hallett's riders. Judge Fallon was to decide whether he would accept bail-bond offered by Duke Searcy for the release of the prisoner. It was assumed as inevitable by most of those in town that if the judge refused to free Kinney the outlaws would storm the jail.

There was no friendly joshing, no give and take of drawling repartee. The Hallett faction held to itself with headquarters at the hotel. Duke Searcy's men drifted in and out of Poole's place. Midway between the two centers of rendezvous was the new brick courthouse. When members of the opposing groups met one another on the street they passed either in silence or with the briefest greeting. Words were dynamite today and might explode violently.

The chief danger zone was at and near the courthouse. The judge was to announce his decision at four o'clock, and for some time before that men moved toward the square from both ends of the street. All of them were armed, and a good many had been drinking.

Long before the appointed time the courtroom was filled and men were standing in the rear back of the benches. As the judge stepped to the platform the court was called to order. There was a deep silence as Judge Fallon's eyes swept the crowded benches preliminary to reading his decision. He was an old man with a strong lined face surmounted by a shock of silvery hair. There was no fear in his eyes, though he knew that what he was about to say might cost him his life. As a boy he had fought with General Houston at San Jacinto for the independence of Texas, and all his life he had walked the straight inflexible line of duty. He did not mean to swerve now, though he had been warned by anonymous letters to give way.

The judge knew that in the room were all the elements that fused by a spark might explode into wholesale tragedy. The Circle Lazy H and its adherents were on the benches to the left. He guessed there must be nearly twenty of them, hard rough characters employed because they were unscrupulous and quick on the trigger. In the front seat were Hallett, Terry, and Linton. The old man sat in the center, his fox face alert, his thin lips tight as a steel trap. His foremen flanked him, Linton slouched down, his leathery face impassive, and Terry erect and arrogant, with stony eyes warily watching the enemy.

Most of those on the right were members of Duke Searcy's loosely tied outlaw band. Fallon's gaze picked up a dozen he knew, all of whom had probably come to Texas with criminal records. Searcy himself was lounging easily against the wall. It was like him, the judge thought, to be standing in the aisle where his insolent flamboyance could be seen by all. He was wearing his embroidered Spanish jacket, a fine white linen shirt open at the throat, and a crimson silk sash wound around his waist. Fallon knew that this reckless desperado had only to lift a hand to start a carnival of death.

But it seemed to the judge that there

are times when truth must be spoken at any price. He recalled a line of Euripides he had read at school in his youth: "This is true liberty, when free-born men speak free."

His clear voice carried to every man in the room.

"My decision in this case is based entirely upon the evidence presented before me," he said. "But back of this particular case is a condition which has made it possible, a condition that is a disgrace to the good name of West Texas. Armed men ride over this and adjoining counties committing heinous crimes, calling men to their doors and shooting them down, killing from ambush, robbing citizens of their property. Some of these men I see in this room now, and I say to you that you are assassins who deserve the extreme penalty of the law."

BOB CHASE was standing at one of the windows, and as he looked out he saw five men dismount at the hitching rack in front of the courthouse and walk through the dog fennel to the porch. Two of the men were Red Hall and Lee Chase. As the judge continued with his castigation of the lawless, Bob could hear the rangers coming up the stairs to the courtroom.

"A feud exists in this county that has drawn in many of you against your wills," Fallon said. "You have not dared to refuse to support the ruffians engaged in these despicable raids. My friends, you are wrong. In the end the law will prove stronger than these scoundrels who flout it, and it is your duty to stand firm for what is just and right. I urge you to declare yourselves against all of these evil-doers, whether they are open outlaws or murderous bravos employed by a large ranch which would like to have us believe it respectable."

Through the open door came Lieutenant Hall, followed by four rangers in pairs. They marched down the aisle and separated in front of the platform, two turning to one side and three to the other. Facing the benches, they halted.

Judge Fallon waited till the stir of their arrival had quieted. He made no comment on their dramatic entrance, though the opportune coming of the intrepid redhead and his men must have lifted a weight of anxiety from his heart.

"I find no justification in the laws of Texas for freeing on bond a man charged with deliberate murder when the case against him is supported by so much evidence as in this one." The judge stopped for a moment, to let his stern eyes range the room. "I therefore commit Bradford Kinney to jail again, there to remain until such time as the state of Texas shall have tried him for the crime with which he is charged."

The stillness for a moment was intense. It was broken by Duke Searcy's scornful laugh.

"An honest judge," he jeered. "A Daniel come to judgment, one Old Man Hallett keeps in his vest pocket."

The voice of the judge rang out again. He looked at the ranger officer, his finger pointing toward the outlaw.

"Arrest that man."

Hall did not wait to give his men orders. He went down the aisle with long swift strides. Those in his way he pushed aside.

"You're under arrest," he told the outlaw curtly.

Searcy faced him, right hand on the butt of his ivory-handled revolver. "So you say," he flung back lightly, his narrowed eyes fixed levelly on the ranger.

"I'll take that gun, Duke," the lieutenant said, holding out his left hand. He had left his rifle leaning against the platform. Now he made no gestures toward the .45 hanging at his side.

Duke did not lift his eyes from Hall, but he knew that the four rangers at the platform had shifted their rifles and were ready for action. With the crook of a finger he could start a massacre. Inside of two

minutes a dozen men would be dead or dying. Reckless and daring scoundrel though he was, he hesitated at giving the signal. To one of the Circle Lazy H men he would not have yielded an inch. But Hall represented in his person the state of Texas. He could kill the lieutenant. Perhaps his men could win the battle that would ensue. But even if they did the rangers would comb the chaparral till he and all his men were wiped out.

He temporized. "Take the guns from these Circle Lazy H men, and I'll give you mine, Red," he evaded. "Without a six-shooter siding me, my life wouldn't be worth a peso against Hallett's killers. You know that."

"Any prisoner of the rangers is safe, Duke."

"Why am I a prisoner? What have I done but tell off this judge Old Dave elected?"

"You are a prisoner because Judge Fallon orders you arrested for contempt of court."

"All right." Searcy flung up a hand in a derisive gesture. "I've been your prisoner before, Red—for a few hours. Let's see how long it will last this time."

He drew his revolver from its scabbard and handed it to the ranger with a scornful laugh.

Hall took him up the aisle to the judge, who looked him directly in the eye before he spoke. He knew the power of this desperado, that henceforth he must walk the streets with the thought ever present that at any time he might be assassinated. But he did not waver.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"You know my name damned well."

The judge rapped on the bench. "Young man, tell me your name."

"I'm not ashamed of it—Duke Searcy."

"Then Duke Searcy I sentence you to a fine of one hundred dollars for contempt of court. Until that sum is paid you will remain in the county jail."

"I reckon I have plenty of contempt for this court," Searcy drawled impudently, "but I don't expect to pay a hundred dollars for it nor stay in jail either."

"Is that a threat, sir?" the judge demanded.

"No, sir, just a statement of fact. Take it or leave it."

The judge said to Hall, "Remove the prisoners." He struck the table in front of him with a gavel. "Court is dismissed."

Hallett moved forward with his oily smile. "Judge, every honest man in Dimmit County will approve of what you have just done," he approved.

Fallon did not see the outstretched hand. "Do you think so, sir?" he replied coldly. Turning, he walked from the room to his chambers.

Brad Kinney rose from the chair where he had been sitting. All through the proceedings he had been placidly chewing tobacco, apparently quite unconcerned as to what the issue would be.

He grinned at Searcy. "Looks like I'm gonna have a friend in the calaboose with me," he said. "The old judge sure did have hell in the neck. I always did like the old coot. I'll bet my boots that at San Jacinto he was some fire-eater when he helped Sam Houston whop Santa Anna."

"We won't either of us be in jail long," Searcy predicted.

"Think not?" Hall asked cheerfully. "*Quien sabe?* It always pays to look on the bright side, as the old fellow said when he broke only one leg."

He detailed three rangers to take the prisoners down the street to the jail. With Lee he remained in the courthouse to make sure that the feudists did not start trouble after the adjournment of court.

CHAPTER XVIII

DISHONORABLY DISCHARGED

SHERIFF GADSDEN had been a cowman in San Saba County, had sold out, and drifted south to the Nueces. He was

a brown-faced stocky man of middle age, a good citizen, tough and resolute. But he was a realist. He recognized the strength of both factions that were at war in the county, and he had no intention of letting Houston Gadsden be crushed between them.

"Looks to me you're like the vaquero who roped a bear and had to yell for help to turn him loose," he told Hall with a grin. "This fellow Searcy is poison. Do you aim to take him to Austin and exhibit him in a cage?"

"I expect you to keep him here in jail until he has paid his fine," the ranger told the local officer.

"Then I'm sure going to disappoint you. My calaboose is an old adobe building that a husky fellow could butt his head through."

"I'll have my men build a cell for you inside the big vacant room on the second floor of the courthouse," Hall proposed.

"Fine. And how long can I hold him there? I have one jailor and no deputies. Searcy's men will have him and Kinney out before the night is over."

"You have five reasonably competent rangers to side you."

"That listens good, but just when I need help you will be chousing some horse thief through the brush down the Nueces twenty miles away."

"Oh, I'll leave one of the boys here when we're away."

"I'm certainly grateful," Gadsden said ironically. "There probably won't be more than thirty or forty guys busting into the courthouse."

The red-headed ranger smiled. "You know the old story about the mayor telegraphing for a company of rangers. One young fellow gets off the train. When the mayor beefs about it, he asks, 'Only one mob, isn't there'?"

"Yeah, I've heard it twenty times, but I never did find out whether the mob ate him up or just rolled over him and left him mashed flat as a pancake." Gadsden flung up his hands. "All right. I'll try to hold my prisoners. If I don't make it, the reason will be that you are not around to help."

The rangers built the cell of heavy wood, steel-barred in front, and transferred the prisoners to it. Kinney told them they were taking too much trouble.

"We're here only for a short stay and we're right comfortable in the old shack," he told Lee with entire good nature. The fact was that Kinney did not object to being confined as much as most men would have done. It gave him an excuse for laziness, and at least three or four times a week his wife brought a basket of home-cooked delicacies to supplement the sheriff's food.

Searcy was of an entirely different temperament. To be in jail deflated his self-esteem. He was a leader among the outlaws, partly because of the effrontery with which he had defied the law. Now he was locked up like any common Mexican arrested for stealing a hog. It was humiliating. He would lose caste with his fellows if he did not get out soon. Moreover, he was an active gregarious man who enjoyed his friends.

For hours at a time he paced the cell while Kinney slept placidly on his cot or read the local newspaper. That there would be a rescue attempt he knew, but as the days passed he wondered why his men did not make a move. Many times he was tempted to pay the hundred dollars and be done with it, but he could not bring himself to do this after he had boasted in open court that he would neither settle the fine nor stay in jail.

Lee was sitting on the courthouse steps one morning when his brother Bob sauntered past with two other spurred vaqueros who had evidently just ridden in from the brush. The dust of the road had sifted into every wrinkle of their clothes.

Bob turned in to talk with the new ranger.

"How do you like your job?" he in-

quired. "Pretty soft, I would say. Nothing to do but hold down the step of a nice sunny porch."

"It's a good job if you like it," Lee said. "Who are your friends?"

At Bob's call they turned and joined him. "Meet my brother Lee," he told them. "Hal Robbins and Pecos Jim. We dropped into town for some smoking. What's doing?"

"Nothing much. Things kinda quiet."

"I hear your friend Hall and the rest of his men headed from town this morning." Bob's voice was careless, but his eyes were alert. "Special business, I reckon."

Lee said, "You'll have to ask him about that; he didn't tell me."

"Come down to Poole's with us and have a drink," Pecos Jim said.

Lee did not explain he did not drink. He said he was on duty.

"Mosey along," Bob suggested to his companions. "I'll join you later. Want to talk with my brother awhile."

He sat down on the top step of the porch and chatted. Before he left he proposed that they have dinner together a little later at the Elite Restaurant. Lee agreed. He had an hour off at noon, he said.

They met at the appointed time, took a table, and ordered dinner. A moment later Bob pushed back his chair.

"Darn I forgot to tell Chesley about having a horse shod. I'll hustle out and tell him now. Back in ten minutes. Tell Ching to keep my coffee hot."

He took a hat from a hook on the wall and hurried out of the restaurant. Lee did not notice that it was his hat that had been taken, an older one than the sombrero Bob wore.

Five minutes later Tom Sharp, the jailor, looked up from a letter he was writing and saw Chase entering the room.

"Lo, Lee," he said. "Didn't take you long to eat."

"Haven't eaten yet. Just remembered that Hall wanted me to ask Kinney a couple of questions about that rustler Bronson we got the other day. We've heard he came here from Colorado—killed a fellow and had to light out from there." Chase was busy rolling a cigarette and was looking down at it. The brim of the hat covered the upper part of his face. "Toss me the keys, will you, Tom?"

Sharp took a bunch of keys from the hook where it hung and flung it to Chase. "Want me to go along?" he asked.

"No. Not necessary. Go on and finish your letter. This is just routine stuff. If I can find out where Bronson came from we can write up there and get his record."

Chase unlocked the room where Searcy and Kinney were kept. Duke stopped walking up and down the cell to glance at the man who had just entered. He took a second astonished look.

"Bob," he cried in a low voice.

Already Bob was trying different keys on the cell lock.

"The boys have horses across the street from the back door," he explained. "I fooled Tom Sharp. He thought I was Lee. We'll take it out of town on the lam. No killing, Duke."

"All right. Hurry up with that lock. Sharp may come up—or your brother."

"Lee is waiting at the Elite for me to come back. I've got the right key at last."

The barred door swung open.

"You haven't a gun for me?" Searcy whispered.

"Pecos has one. He's waiting with the horses. You won't need it."

The men tiptoed down the stairs and followed the corridor to the back door. They ran across the street to the horses at the hitch rack. A moment later the five men were dashing down the street. Searcy swung his Mexican hat and let out a yell of triumph.

Lee was standing at the door of the restaurant waiting for the return of his

brother when he heard the outlaw's "Hi-yi-yippy-yi." The hurried departure of Bob had puzzled him. He did not see why the matter of the horse shoeing could not have waited a half hour longer.

Startled at the shout, Lee ran to the corner of the building and looked across to the next street. He saw five men galloping out of town. Two of them he recognized, Duke Searcy and his brother Bob. Instantly he knew that he had been diddled, though he did not yet quite understand how it had been done.

He ran to the courthouse and met Sharp coming down the stairs two at a time.

"They've got away," the jailor called to him. "How did they get the key from you?"

Lee guessed that his brother had impersonated him, and he felt a cold sinking at the diaphragm. He knew Bob had allied himself with men who had gone bad, but he had not expected a betrayal like this. It made him heartsick. That he would free a pair of desperate criminals was bad enough. To do it at the expense of a twin brother who had sacrificed a great deal for him showed a callousness Lee would never have believed without proof.

He explained the jail-break to Sharp, after a question had confirmed his suspicion.

"I'm certainly a plumb fool," the jailor admitted bitterly. "The whole thing looked kinda queer to me. You poppin' in that way after you had started to dinner when you might just as well have waited till afterward, and you having yore hat pulled low over yore face. But I never suspicioned it wasn't you."

Lee knew he was through as a ranger. He might be able to convince Hall that he was not in collusion with Bob, but the authorities at Austin would not take that view. He had been in a restaurant with his brother, a friend of Duke Searcy. He had remained there while Bob walked out, impersonated him, and freed the prisoners. It was a practical certainty that he would be discharged dishonorably.

Hall did not leave him long in doubt as to what he thought of the affair.

"Of course you want my resignation," Lee told him.

"No," the lieutenant told him bluntly. "You are suspended pending an investigation. You probably won't be allowed to resign but will be kicked out."

Young Chase did not think it worth while to point out that the escape had been made at a time when he was not on duty, during the one hour of the day when the sheriff was expected to substitute for whatever ranger had been left as guard. He knew that Hall would be blamed for having employed him, knowing that both he and his brother had left Kansas after having killed Texans, especially in view of the fact that Bob was running with the Searcy gang. Even if the lieutenant wanted to save him he could not do it.

"Do I stay here?" Lee asked.

"No, sir. You report at Austin, after I have made an investigation." Hall hammered a freckled fist on the table. "I ought to lose my commission for picking you," he went on bitterly. "This is the first time, as far as I know, that any ranger has lost a prisoner already locked up in a cell.

It is a disgrace to the service. Maybe you are innocent. I don't know. It looks bad for you. In any case you are not the stuff of which rangers are made. By your own story you sat there in the restaurant twiddling your thumbs while your smart brother, wearing a hat belonging to you that he had put on before your eyes, walked out and freed these men."

The attitude of Hall was reflected in the other rangers at Carrizo. Lee had enjoyed the camaraderie of the camp. The boys serving with him were gay, lighthearted lads who made fun of one another unmercifully. But when Chase joined them for dinner the talk died down at once. If any of them spoke to him it was with

scrupulous politeness. He was an outsider, no longer one of them.

Lee took his punishment from them with a wooden face, but he carried with him to Austin a heart filled with bitter unhappiness. The morning after his dismissal the Austin *Statesman* ran the story of his disgrace. He was not an important person, and there was not more than a dozen lines of the account. But every sentence of it stung him with shame.

CHAPTER XIX

A REBEL'S DAUGHTER REBELS

COLONEL JACKSON was eating his breakfast, reading the *Express*, and carrying on an ejaculatory monologue by way of news criticism. Mary May was his audience, and she did not pay much attention to the paternal comments. Her thoughts were busy with an important problem, to decide whether a hat she had looked at yesterday would really go well with her new challis frock.

Old Sam, who had been a slave of the Jacksons before the war, brought in another plate of hot biscuits. The colonel reached for one without looking. His eyes

had been caught by a paragraph in the paper with a name in it that jumped out at him.

"Hmp! One of your friends in trouble," he snorted

Mary May postponed her decision about the hat. "Which one? And what kind of trouble?" she asked.

Her father cleared his throat and settled himself.

Word has just come from the governor's office at Austin (Jackson read aloud) of the dishonorable discharge of a ranger in Lieutenant Hall's company, a man by the name of Lee Chase. It appears that Chase, who has a record as a killer in Kansas, enlisted recently and was serving with Hall at Carrizo Springs. He has a twin brother, very like him in appearance and evidently in disposition, since he has killed two men within a few months, who is one of Duke Searcy's notorious gang. As reported in the *Express*, Duke Searcy has been in jail on order by Judge Fallon for contempt of court. The testimony shows that the Chase brothers connived to help Searcy and another bad man escape. Dressed in the clothes of Lee, the outlaw twin Bob secured the prison keys, released the prisoners, and rode out of town with them. There is much excitement in Dimmit County over the escape, and it is expected that Searcy will at once renew his feud with the ranchmen of the district and start raiding and murdering. The disgraced ranger will not be prosecuted, as there is not enough direct evidence to show that he knew of the plot to free Searcy.

"I don't believe a word of it," Mary May broke out impulsively.

The colonel began to sputter. "Great Jehosophat! Why do you talk like that? It's here in black and white."

"Because I don't." Mary May modified her statement. "I mean I don't think Lee Chase had anything to do with it. He's not that kind of man. It must have been all his brother's doing."

"You don't know anything about it. Use your head. They are both killers. Both came down the trail to escape the law. Bad eggs. That's what they are. They fixed this up together."

Mary May sat very straight in her chair. Her eyes were bright with defiance. "No," she differed stoutly.

"Yes," Jackson roared, his face getting

apoplectic. "Don't talk thataway to me. You've only met him three times. He's a Yank. Won't taste the best mint julep ever made in Texas. I tell you he's no good."

The girl would not let it go at that, though she knew his temper and was just a little afraid of it. "I know he is," she insisted.

The colonel was amazed at her stubbornness. She was a gentle girl, not at all insubordinate. Usually she appeared to accept his opinions as gospel. That was what a man had a right to expect of his womenfolk in a household of which he was the head.

"I never heard such—such impudence in my life," the old Confederate flared up. "Go to your room, missie—and stay there."

Mary May curtsied. "Yes, sir," she said, obediently. But the eyes that met those of the colonel carried a no-surrender flag.

He stormed out of the house and went downtown to sit in the lobby of the Menger discussing the not-so-recent war, politics, and the state of the country with his cronies. But he had a cold feeling in the pit of his stomach. Mary May was all he had. His sun rose and set in her. This was the only real quarrel he had had with her, and he could not take it. He drove home and went up to her room.

"Aren't you ashamed, Mary May?" he asked her.

She slid a look at him and knew he was holding out a white flag but was trying to save face. Without wasting words she went into his arms and let him start to pet her. She too was happy at the reconciliation, but she had made up her mind none the less to see Lee Chase if she could.

There was a strong urge in her to tell him that she believed in him, that she knew he had been treated unjustly. He was in a strange country far from his friends. If he was as sensitive as she thought him he must be feeling very keenly his disgrace.

He might not have come back to San Antonio, but if he was here she could probably get news of him at the Southern Hotel. That afternoon she had their black boy Frank drive her to the Plaza. She sent him on an errand and told him to return for her in half an hour. This was an unladylike thing to do. She knew that. An unmarried girl could not go to a hotel and inquire for a man. Mary May felt her heart pounding as she walked across the plaza toward the Southern. As the eyes of the clerk fastened wonderingly on her, after she had asked if Mr. Lee Chase was staying there, she felt the hot color rising to her cheeks.

"He came in last night," the clerk said.

"Would you please tell him that—that a lady would like to speak with him?"

"Name, please."

"Just say a lady." She added, feeling shame at what she read in his censorious eyes: "I have a message for him. Please tell him that I'll be waiting on the gallery."

But to avoid attention she moved down the street a little way. When Lee Chase came out looking for her, he saw Mary May buying a posy from a Mexican flower girl.

"I wanted to see you," she said. "Will you walk with me to the old San Fernando Cathedral?"

HE ADJUSTED his long strides to her short steps. Her eyes were downcast. She felt shy and embarrassed. This was an outrageous thing she was doing. What would he think of her?

"You ought not to have come here," he told her stiffly.

"I know." Her low voice was unsure. It was easy to put her in the wrong. Of course he was right. No Southern lady ought to have done such a thing. "You think I'm—brazen."

"No," he corrected gravely. "I never could think that. But I'm in disgrace. You ought not to have anything to do with

me. Before anybody sees us together you had better go."

Mary May ignored that. What she had done she had done. Abruptly she plumped out the thought in her mind. "I had to tell you that I know you didn't do it. I saw the paper this morning. It's not true."

Her trust lifted a weight that lay icy cold inside him. He had been depressed and unhappy, for the first time in his life a beaten man. As long as he lived there would be this black mark against him. But if this girl believed in him there was still something to live for.

"Thank you," he said, his voice rough with feeling.

"Won't you tell me the story?"

He told her the facts.

"You weren't to blame at all," she cried. "They're terribly unfair to you. I'm disappointed in Lieutenant Hall. I'd think he would see how it was."

"Don't put it on him," Chase answered. "What else could he do? I think he believes my story, but he feels I ought not to have let Bob fool me. He is right. Looking back on it, I can see now that I ought to have suspected him. In his report Hall said he thought I was telling the truth, though he recommended my dismissal. They did not think so at Austin. All the evidence was against me."

"What's evidence when you know a man?" she asked.

He wanted to bless her for her confidence in him. He wanted her to know how very greatly he valued it. But he had to be careful not to say too much.

"I have a friend," he told her. "I reckon I won't see her again, but I'll never forget."

"Why won't you see me again?" she demanded.

"Because I must not. Your father would put a stop to it, anyhow."

"Yes," she nodded. "Father does not feel as I do."

"I can't blame him for that." Chase smiled, adding, "Even before this he thought me a stiff-necked Yank."

"He doesn't understand you, and I don't think you understand him. He's the salt of the earth— But what are you going to do? Will you stay here?"

A rough plan had been forming in his mind, one he was inclined to reject as too fanciful for success. But his meeting with her had buttressed it.

"I'll stick around West Texas," he said. "Don't like to run away under fire."

Her eyes were bright with approval. "I'm sure you're right."

What he was going to do would be misunderstood. He had to make it clear to her that there was and would be a barrier between them impossible to break down. "There may be worse stories than this about me before I am through," he told her grimly.

Her startled violet eyes fixed on his. "What do you mean?"

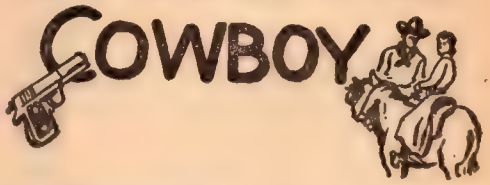
There was no need telling her what he hoped to do. No doubt she would think it foolish. There would be danger, and that might distress her. Moreover, he felt he had no right to try to strengthen the relation between them.

"Time you were going," he said gently, and offered his hand. "I'll not forget how kind you have been to me. *Adios.*"

He meant the Spanish farewell in its original rather than the conventional meaning. He wanted to confide her to the care of God. Her trust in him had been like food for the hungry, like water in the desert. As long as he lived he would never forget her gallant gesture.

(*Part III in the next* SHORT STORIES)

THE CURIOUS LUCK OF THE DRUGSTORE COWBOY



Luck Can Play As Large a Part in Destiny As Many Other Things—Maybe Larger

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

LAFE LARRIGAN, top wrangler of the B Bar F, was lean and brown and hard, with a humorous twist to his lips and a look in his eyes that made you like him on sight. He shifted his six-gun slightly, rolled a cigarette with one hand, and turned to his assistant, who lounged beside him at the gate of the stables.

"Tex, you watch yourself!" he drawled. "The outfit that arrived today is in the big money.

"The boss tipped me off. They got a Lincoln and a chauffeur. The boss says that anybody makin' a play for the girl gets his time pronto."

Tex, whose Angora chaps made his knees itch, scowled and rubbed his heavy chin.

"Yeah, but what if she makes a play for us? You know's well as I do why these women-folks come to places like this. If I got to take fool women ridin', I'd be a fool not to marry me a wad of dough. That's where a good-lookin' cow-puncher like us gets his luck."

"Well, don't crowd your luck none," said Larrigan. "The draft board has deferred me, so the job's safe for the summer; don't you spoil things. And you'd better read up on some of them Western novels in the bunkhouse. You still get tangled when you talk about hosses. Here comes the boss, durn him! I hope them boots pinch his toes."

Forbes was approaching briskly from the main house. He was big and burly and genial. Bill and Irma Forbes had no end of personality and charm and ability; that was why they had made a success of the B Bar F. Forbes walked a bit stiffly. His Levis were tucked into the tops of an elegant pair of boots, decorated with gaudy stitching.

"Hi, boys!" he said heartily. "Lafe, did you get them rattlers planted up the hill trail?"

"Yeah." Larrigan grinned. "Plenty rocks there. They'll hang around that hillside."

"Well, don't you boys get too anxious to show off your shooting," said Forbes. "Them snakes cost plenty dough. Make the dozen last out the season, see? Show 'em off as you pass along, but don't do any shooting unless you got an important guest along who wants a skin. It was a swell idea to send out west for them snakes."

"Okay," said Tex. "What's the orders?"

"We got heavy reservations coming for the week-end; looks like a full house. You'll have a riding party in half an hour. Seven women. I've got three musicians comin' up tonight from Brooklyn, mouth-harp, accordion and banjo. Lafe, you see to it that they get into the proper clothes

and so forth. They'll play to the guests in the moonlight."

"Won't be no moon tonight," said Larrigan. "It's right new."

"Well, then build a fire!" retorted Forbes. "And never mind about cowboy songs. These guests want their own kind of music, see? And mind you keep them Brooklyn fellers away from the main house in the daytime. Oh, yes! One of these women riders was champing about having been out west—Arizona or somewhere. She's a Mrs. Parsons and important as hell; a party of six from Westchester County are coming up on her sayso next week. So play her careful."

He clumped away toward the garage. Going into town for the mail, thought Larrigan, in the station wagon. It helped advertise the place.

"You handle the Parsons female," said Tex. "I ain't sure enough of my Western lingo."

"Okay." Larrigan tossed away his cigarette. "We'd better get the hosses saddled up. And say! You're not wearing your deputy sheriff's badge."

Tex looked down at his faded shirt. "That's right. Washed my shirt last night and forgot to put the star back. I'll get it."

For the looks of the thing, Forbes had persuaded the Van Cortlandt County sheriff to make his riders deputies. The sheriff, who took his position seriously, was reluctant; but the B Bar F represented an investment of close to fifty thousand dollars, and was therefore well worth humoring.

Forbes, who had toured the Western regions with his wife and made careful notes, ran this Adirondack dude ranch with a keen eye to both costs and staging. Irma ran the house and ran it well. There was atmosphere in plenty, and whether it was authentic did not matter a hoot. They knew that their customers wanted to be impressed, so they were impressed. Staid Van Cortlandt County rubbed its eyes, and money rolled in.

According to Forbes, the first principle of such a place was to have the stables on the road, to pull in the suckers. So the B Bar F stables, impressively Western and decrepit, fronted the highway. Behind lay the main house, the dining shack, garage, swimming pool and so forth. The Trading Post did a hot business all season, selling Indian curios, Levis and boots, souvenirs of all kinds. The big silver-mounted saddle in the lobby of the main house was just a bit of stage property.

Tex was an Alabama boy with a delicious southern accent and a gift for handling horses and women alike. Larrigan—well, it was different with Larrigan. He despised himself and the place and the suckers who fell for it, but the job paid well. He was the only real thing on the lot, but no one knew it, for he kept his actual background behind closed doors.

WHEN things had gone bust for him in Montana it was a complete bust. Another man got his girl and this washed him up. He sold what was left of his business and headed east, a drifter, a broken man. Now he was cheating destiny—a drug-store cowboy in a fake stage setting playing to the sucker trade, he told himself, with bitter contempt. But he was eating regular. Larrigan was not his name, but it was good enough for this place.

In half an hour the party assembled, most of the women in jodhpurs, two in Levis. Larrigan got a start when he saw Mrs. Parsons and spoke to her. She was a trim, cool blonde who looked like Anna Lowry. Anna, back in Butte with her mining engineer.

He and Tex shepherded them off along the flat toward the hill trail, gave them pointers on riding, handed out the usual patter. Some of them were expecting husbands or friends to arrive for the week-end. Larrigan rode with Mrs. Parsons and her companion, mostly. He liked her. She had sense. More and more she reminded him of Anna, and wakened the old hurt

within him, the ache that he had thought forgotten.

They reached the hill trail, scared up one of the planted rattlesnakes, gave the girls a thrill, and went on. Tex was at his best, voluble and merry; he threw out offhand memories of how he and Larrigan had punched cattle together for the Flowerpot outfit, and had been with the XY that time when the sheep war was on, and so forth; Tex had done a lot of reading up. Larrigan noticed that Mrs. Parsons listened with an amused air, and when they were strung out on the Squirrel Hollow road, she turned to him with a question.

"Larrigan, that friend of yours is interesting. Do you think he was ever west of the Mississippi?"

Larrigan met her eye, and his lips twitched. Her companion was ahead, out of hearing.

"Yes'm, I guess he was, once. In Leavenworth."

She laughed suddenly, charmingly. "All right; I'll keep the secret! But you'd better do some coaching. My sister's coming tomorrow, and she's really from the west. And a couple of friends coming next week who know their stuff."

Larrigan gave her another look. "What makes you think I could coach him? Me, I'm just a drug-store cowboy myself."

"Don't be absurd," she rejoined. "Anyone could see with half an eye that you're no fake. Don't worry, I'm having the time of my life! But tell Tex not to lay it on so thick."

"Thanks, I will," said Larrigan. "I noticed your own boot heels were worn down a lot."

The string of riders got back at noon, barely in time for a bath and a change before lunch. Tex, helping to turn in the horses, chuckled happily.

"No ridin' tomorrow, Lafe! There'll be the sorest lot o' fannies you ever seen, all parked in pillows."

"We'll have new ones tomorrow," said Larrigan, and passed on the warning. Tex, who had a lot of sense behind his massive features, nodded amiably.

"Good thing I left that Parsons dame to you. All right, I'll be careful. Mind, we got to sashay around the main house this afternoon, for appearances."

They were up there, lounging and talking with the guests, helping maintain the informal, free-and-easy atmosphere that Forbes desired, when it happened.

A car swung in at the entrance, a man got out and came inside. He was heavily built, young, with broad, powerful features and hot eyes of impatience. At sight of him, Larrigan gaped with fallen jaw, then turned his back quickly and stared out of a window. In the glass, he could see reflected what passed in the room.

The newcomer went up to the desk.

"My name's Norton. I'm looking for a Mrs. Parsons—oh, there she is!" He swung around and crossed to where Mrs. Parsons was sitting, near the window. "Hello, Emily! Run you down at last, have I? May I have a word with you in private?"

"You may not," she responded with cool hostility. "I want nothing to do with you in any way, shape or form."

"Well, I want plenty to do with you!" Norton's face darkened angrily. "You and your blasted husband have been hiding my wife out on me long enough! I can have the law on you, and I will; but first I'll handle things myself. Where's Anna?"

"None of your business," said Mrs. Parsons.

"Listen, Emily; she's my wife, understand? I've come east to settle this thing, and I mean to do it!" Norton was quivering with passion. "So you've got her up to this place, have you? Well, I'll find her if I have to go through it with the police!"

"Wives aren't property any more," spat out Mrs. Parsons.

As though aware of the fact that others were within hearing, Norton glanced around. His eye fell on the figure of Larrigan. An oath of astonished recognition

escaped him; then he laughed, and his laugh was ugly.

"So that's it!" he said significantly. "That's why you've got her here, is it? Now it begins to come clear—"

Larrigan swung around as though on a pivot. He met, the hot, furious eyes of Norton, and then he launched himself, without a word. He just seemed to uncoil; his fist caught Norton square on the belt-line. Norton doubled up and fell backward into the fireplace. Amid the confusion, Bill Forbes charged on the scene.

"Here! What the devil!" he roared, stopping everything and facing Larrigan. "Fighting in here? Striking a guest? You're fired, blast your lousy hide! Pack your duffel and clear out—"

"He'll do nothing of the kind." Mrs. Parsons intervened, cool as ever. "This man came in and insulted me. He's my brother-in-law, and he's a dangerous man, and Mr. Larrigan hit him."

"I'll say he did!" said Forbes, amid vociferous corroboration from the other women. He looked at Norton, who was pulling himself out of the fireplace. "Out of here, you monkey! Larrigan's a deputy sheriff, and if you show your nose in here again you'll get it wiped off in jail. Scram!"

Norton went to the door and turned.

"Larrigan! So that's the name he's using, is it? I'll remember that," he said, and went out to his car and drove off. Mrs. Parsons looked at Bill Forbes.

"Well? Is Mr. Larrigan fired?"

"He is not," said Forbes, grinning.

"Then I want him to get two horses and give me a riding lesson," she said calmly. "Hurry up, Larrigan! Get that gingerbread horse Mrs. Smith had this morning; he singlefoots nicely."

Larrigan, who was white and stiff, looked as though about to refuse; then he nodded and went out.

They rode off together, and neither of them spoke for a while.

"Well, let's get it over," said Mrs. Parsons in her quiet way. "I couldn't bear to do any talking around that place. What's the answer?"

"It's a hell of an answer," replied Larrigan. "I thought all the time you looked a lot like Anne Lowry, but I couldn't guess you were her sister."

"Well, I'll be—" Mrs. Parsons checked herself in time.

"You might's well have let Bill Forbes fire me," Larrigan went on. "I'll have to scram out of here before she comes, anyhow. It's just my blasted luck."

"What do you know about it?" she snapped.

"Everything," replied Larrigan sourly. "Everything that's bad. If I found a dime in the road, it'd be phoney. When I get a good job, something comes up to chase me off. I thought it'd be different here; but it's just the same. The last place in the world anybody from Montana would turn up—and look at 'em! He walks in and knows me right away! And she's coming tomorrow."

They rode on in silence for a little while, Mrs. Parsons looking thoughtful.

"Luck! That's a funny thing," she said. "You've had nothing but bad luck, eh? Since when?"

Larrigan gave her a glance. "Since Anne turned me down to marry that bellyacher."

"That's what you think. So you're that man, eh? His name wasn't Larrigan; it was Bonham."

"Larrigan's my name now."

"And all you can think of is your bad luck! Wrapped up in yourself, aren't you? Never occurred to you that maybe she was worse off than you, did it? Worse luck, I mean. Why do you suppose Norton was here looking for her?"

Larrigan frowned. "I dunno. Haven't stopped to think about it."

"More fool you. From the day she married him, she's been in hell. He's a dipsomaniac, a secret drinker; liquor makes him insane, positively insane! Why, I've seen her with her face bruised black and blue from his blows! She's left him twice.

The first time, he soft-soaped her into going back to him, but never again!"

"Good lord, I never knew anything about it!" Larrigan swore softly. If I'd known it, I'd have hit him a few times more. He beat her up, you say—Anne? Why, a gorilla couldn't do that! She's the sweetest thing that ever lived—" He cut off his words, gave her another glance, and added, "Except maybe her sister."

His eyes twinkled. Mrs. Parsons lit a cigarette and puffed thoughtfully.

"I'm beginning to understand your run of bad luck," she observed. "So you're the man she should have married and didn't! Well, Norton has threatened to kill her if she left him; his so-called pride is typical of that type of man. He's tried to kill her, too. That's why she's been hiding out with me. She can't get a divorce in this state, either."

"So you see why I've got to light out of here," said Larrigan.

"Why? So she'll have to take her medicine?"

"I don't get you."

"Norton won't go far. He knows that she loved you all the time."

Larrigan jumped. "You're crazy! She married him!"

"So I believe. Norton's drinking. He believes that she's coming here because you're here. He'll stick around. He'll disgrace her if he can! He'll kill her if he can do it. The man's a homicidal maniac."

"You can wire her not to come."

"No. Let her come. You'll be far away and safe."

Larrigan drew rein. "Stop your blasted prodding me!" he rapped out. "I get you. I'll stay, then, if you'll tell me why you're so set on it!"

SHE smiled at him and carefully flipped her cigarette stub among the rocks.

"Certainly. I know more about luck than you do; bad luck has to change sometime, and this is the time for yours to change. Not that I'm worried about you; it's Anne I'm thinking about. Her luck has been far worse than yours. She's lost everything."

"Well," he rejoined, "why the devil would you want me to stick around when it'll only make trouble for all hands?"

She gave him her bright, confident nod.

"Trouble? We're made for trouble; we all have it. That's what makes us men and women, Larrigan. We're made to meet it and fight it and overcome it, not to turn tail and run away from it. A dose of bad luck hits you and you run; you make the bad luck real."

"I get you," he said. His shoulders had squared a little as he listened. "I get you. It's a new idea to me, but it's good. All right. I'll see it through. But I'll bet you Anne turns and runs when she finds I'm here."

Not till they went riding on Saturday morning did Anne make the discovery. She was a younger edition of Mrs. Parsons, pale, self-composed, blonde, and pretty as a picture. When Larrigan gave her a hand into the saddle she looked at him, and gasped once, and looked again. Lafe touched his hat, smiled into her eyes, and went about his business. Mrs. Parsons was riding with Anne, anyway.

Later, when they were back at the main house entrance, Anne lingered till the others had trooped in. Then, dismounting she gave her reins to Larrigan, looked him in the eyes and put out her hand to him, unsmiling.

"Emily has told me all about it," she said. "It's nice to know you're here."

"Thanks, Anne," he replied awkwardly. "If I can do anything, you know where to reach me."

"Yes. Could we go for a ride again, just the two of us, this afternoon?"

"Nothing easier. That's what Bill rents horses for."

Nothing easier—it was like a dream to be with her again, riding the hill trail and

on to the Hollow. She had suffered; she was older, graver, steadier, but the girl he had known was still there. And thanks to the ice having been broken by Emily Parsons, things were not too difficult; they bridged the gap of the past bravely and frankly. As to looking at the future, that was different. She was another man's wife, and both of them were too honest to forget the fact.

"I'm going back west," she said. "I can get a divorce there."

"Will you let me know when you do?" Larrigan asked. "There's a whole book of things I'm burning to say to you when that time comes."

"I'll let you know," she replied quietly.

They understood each other, without more words.

Larrigan was like a new man; he had a different look in his face, a different spring in his step. He no longer felt that bad luck was dogging him. Bill Forbes, who had his hands full with the week-end crowd, met him that evening and drew him aside.

"What's got into you, Lafe? You look like a million dollars!"

"Just getting young again, I reckon."

"Well, keep your eye peeled. I saw Norton when I was in town this afternoon. He's been doing some talking, so I went slap to the sheriff and told him about the scene here. He said you and Tex are deputies and can protect the guests yourselves."

"I reckon we can," said Larrigan.

"And you boys had better shoot one of those rattlers when you're out with the morning crowd. Might get some good publicity out of it for the ranch."

Larrigan tipped off Tex, who grinned sheepishly.

"You do it, Lafe. Honest, I couldn't hit the side of a barn with this here six-gun of mine! She bucks like a house afire when I shoot. Mrs. Parsons tells me to keep an eye out for that feller you had the run-in with."

"Oh, she did? Might not be a bad idea at that."

Sunday passed, with chaps and Levis and rodeo shirts dotting the nearby Adirondack scenery like imported beetles. Larrigan got a huge diamondback with ten rattles, too, causing huge excitement, and no end of kodak films were used up when the big fellow was laid out in the front of the main house.

SUNDAY night there was an exodus, but half a dozen stayed on. Mrs. Parsons and Anne, with friends expected in a couple of days, remained. The three Brooklyn lads also stayed; they were an immense success, and had written a Western ballad of their own which went over big. It was all about little dogies come on—which they took to be little dogs, but nobody knew the difference.

To Larrigan, the world was all new. He often thought of Mrs. Parsons' words: "If you run from bad luck you make it real. Meet it and fight it, and it may prove to be a phantom."

"That's what she meant," he told himself with conviction. "And it's true, by gravy! We were made, all of us, to meet trouble halfway; that's what trouble is for, maybe. Think of how I've whined about my bad luck all this time! Makes me sick to remember it. What we've got to do is grapple our problems and fight 'em out."

Monday came, bringing heavy clouds and boding storm. The morning canter got off to a late start. While they were on the hill trail, the horse Anne was riding developed a loose off hind shoe, and Larrigan conferred with Tex.

"There's a smith at Squirrel Hollow," he said. "Instead of taking the woods road, s'pose we go to the Hollow, like we've been doing? I'll cut off with Mrs. Norton from here, make the Hollow road, and get the shoe fixed. You go on around and catch up."

"Okay by me," said Tex indifferently.

So Anne and Larrigan cut away from the trail by way of the Hodges pasture, which

led them into the main pike for Squirrel Hollow, well ahead of the others. It was a narrow, deserted little country dirt road, too unimportant to form part of the paved highway system.

They came into a long straightaway that extended for a couple of miles with not a building in sight. Anne exclaimed delightedly.

"Imagine such a wilderness scene in crowded New York state! We might be in the wilds of Montana—no, I take it all back. Isn't that a car under those trees at the right?"

"Car it is." Larrigan squinted ahead. "Some farmer out inspecting his rocks and fences. Too early in the day for parked turtledoves."

They rode along. As they approached the car, a man got out unsteadily, and hurled something into the road; it was an empty bottle, that bounced and rolled almost to the horses' feet. A whiskey bottle.

From Anne came a low, frightened cry. Larrigan was slower of recognition, until the man strode out into the road, facing them. Then he knew, and drew rein, and saw the big blued Colt in Norton's hand.

"I been waiting for you two quite a spell," said Norton. "Come on, get off those horses! Quick about it, Anne—you hear me?"

"Easy, now!" Larrigan pushed his horse ahead of the other. "Easy, Norton!"

A burst of profanity came from Norton's lips. He threw up the Colt; his features were twisting in a convulsion of passion.

"Pile off!" he cried. "Off, or I'll shoot the horses as well—cheating on me, eh? I'm going to settle you for keeps, you yellow-haired hellcat! I've got the two of you."

Anne pulled hard on one rein. Her horse reared wildly and turned in air. Cursing her, Norton fired point-blank. The bursting report was drowned in a scream from the horse, which plunged sideways and fell, pinning her beneath his weight.

At the shot almost under his nose, Larrigan's horse went straight into the air, shied violently to one side, and the sunfishing motion spilled Larrigan out of the saddle. He tumbled into the dust, rolled over, came to his feet, catlike, and stood uncertainly. The Colt exploded again, but not at him.

"Stop it!" Anne's voice lifted in frantic desperation and terror. "You nearly hit me."

"I aim to hit you!" Norton laughed jeeringly. "You've got tickets to Kingdom Come, both of you!"

Larrigan clapped hand to gun, only to find the holster empty. That tumble had kicked the gun loose and it was gone. Norton caught the motion, looked at him, and laughed again in demoniac fury.

"First her, then you!" he spat out. "You damned cheap imitation cowpuncher!"

"Drug-store cowboy is the word," said Larrigan. "You burn for murder in this state, Norton. Leave her alone, d'you hear me? Only a cheap coward would use a gun on a woman."

He was moving as he spoke, imperceptibly, carefully. Norton was peering through the thinning dust at Anne, and hell looked out of his eyes. Her horse was kicking spasmodically, but she was pinned by one leg, unable to move. Norton threw up the Colt and drew back the hammer.

"This time, damn you—!"

Larrigan, poised and tensed for the leap, let himself go. He was powerless to intervene; he did not try it. He went at Norton in a dive, one hand outstretched. Norton swung around to meet him. The Colt exploded again as they came together; that frantic, diving leap ended in a burst of fire, a shock, a wild scramble as Norton was dragged down by Larrigan's weight.

Everything was dust and flurried motion as the two men went rolling in the road. The deliberate murder-project of that drink-maddened brain had gone askew, but murder was none the less close at hand. Norton fired again in blind rage. The shock paralyzed Larrigan momentarily and he

knew he was hit; the stopping power of a .45 was incredible. His hand gripped upon something and he hung on, desperately, grimly.

He had Norton by the ankle.

Norton got to his feet. A scream of fury burst from him at sight of Anne, frantically trying to extricate herself from her dying horse. The animal was still lashing out. Norton flung up the Colt at her, but Larrigan's weight hung on his ankle, spoiled his shot and his balance, and he toppled forward.

Recovered from his shock, Larrigan pulled himself in. Norton tried vainly to kick him away; he landed a heel in Larrigan's face, but Larrigan came on. Norton twisted about and pulled trigger. The hammer clicked; the Colt was empty.

Then Larrigan was up with him, was upon him.

Norton fought like the madman he was. He lashed out with the Colt, gashed Larrigan's scalp, got a handful of dust shoved down his throat as he screamed wild profanity. Larrigan knocked the Colt from his hand. They scrambled for it, missed it, broke clear and came to their feet, slugging.

Larrigan was blind to everything else, now. Choking and blinded with dust and blood; he matched Norton in a fighting frenzy that closed out the world. Back and forth they staggered, battling like two mad dogs. Larrigan walked into a smash that brought him short up; he recovered, balanced, reached in with a crack to the face that sent Norton reeling away, and set himself for the return rush.

None came. Instead, he heard a dull, thudding *"clop"* followed by a terrible gasp, and then the dust thinned and drifted off and settled.

Wiping his eyes clear, Larrigan saw the white face and wide, horrified eyes of Anne, twisting to lift at the weight that held her. Then he saw Norton lying in the road, a sprawling inert thing, under the hooves of the dying, thrashing horse. He did not need to ask what that queer sound had been, when he looked at Norton's head; a lashing hoof had struck him squarely, crushing his skull.

He got Anne clear and then stood beside her, panting.

"My leg's twisted and hurt, but it doesn't seem broken," she said. Then, looking up suddenly, she caught her breath. "But you —the blood—"

Larrigan surveyed himself, incredulously. His shirt was ripped and dribbling blood; that bullet had seared across his chest, breaking the skin but nothing more.

"Talk about luck!" he exclaimed. "Half an inch deeper and it'd have ploughed me in two! As it is, it's nothing but a scratch."

"But where is he—oh!" She saw Norton's figure.

"The horse kicked him," said Larrigan. "You won't need to get any divorce now, Anne."

They were silent for a space. The horse gave a last kick, shivered, and relaxed in death. Larrigan got out a packet of cigarettes—tailor mades—and lit one, inhaling the smoke gratefully. It helped steady him at once.

"One for me, please." Anne reached up, and he complied. "Remember what you said just now—about luck?"

"Sure." Larrigan held a match for her, and her eyes lifted to him.

"Then you know. The luck's turned. There's no more bad luck, no more at all!"

His lips twitched. "Reckon there never was any, Anne," he said. "It was just a shadow that became real when I ran from it. No more running!" He sighted distant dust-spurts and nodded. "There comes Tex and the rest of the crowd. Lucky thing, Anne, I didn't kill this fellow Norton. It's all plain to see how he ended—lucky thing, eh? Want to make the luck all come true, before they can get a clear sight of us?"

He leaned down, and she lifted her lips to meet his.

WHO HAVE SOWN THE WIND

By DAY KEENE

Inter-office Communication
N. B. C. Short Wave Listening
Post—Montauk Point, L. I.
3 PM, June 25th, 1943

The following verbatim broadcast picked up via short wave DXZ, 9.57 meg., 31.3 m., 2 PM. Would suggest that it be rechecked via Rome 2RO4, 11.81 meg., 25.4 m., or Moscow RNE, 12 meg., 25 m, before being rebroadcast or given to the papers. There has been no communication from either Berlin or London since. The transcript of the broadcast —evidently by Lord Haw Haw—is as follows:

THIS is the end. There is no doubt. Silly, is it not, how often the stupid old Biblical prophesies and admonitions do come true? This is the plain of Esdraelon, the Armageddon as far as this mighty nation and its sacred struggle to free the world is concerned.

From here, where I sit at my microphone in a shell-fire lighted room, wondering how long the frantically-working control room engineers can keep us on the air, and attempting, under the direction of a badly wounded infantry division commander, to coordinate the futile efforts of what few fighting units we have left, I can see the sky black with planes through the bomb-torn roof of the building. This is probably the last broadcast that I will ever make. It may end abruptly at any moment.

There are not many of us left now. Those civilians who could, left the city days ago. In a way it was foolish for them to do so. It matters little where a man dies, if he must die. There was nowhere for them to go. So far as we know, they

are dead, their bodies fertilizer to the fields on which a new race and a new order must subsist.

There was nowhere for them to go. We are hemmed in on all four sides. Of all the far flung New Order we had decreed the only spot of ground that we still have under organization is this bloodsoaked pile of stone and rubble in which we are making our last stand. Those quiet days of my early youth in a placid, green, English countryside with its clipped, clean hedges, its beech, and laurel, and hornbeam, and yew, seem very far away.

Sic semper tyrannis, we who are about to die salute you, and all that sort of thing. A simple people, the English, of which I am one—and declared by them a traitor. They love such simple things; the smell of the wet good earth after a night of rain; the song of a lark at sunrise; church bells in the distance; the pound of the surf on the high chalk cliffs of Dover; the tradition that England always loses every battle but the last one.

Your pardon a moment, please.

Yes sir. Divisions forty-three—sixty-one—fifty-two. Fall back. Your flank is unprotected. They have been annihilated. Take cover in the houses. Our anti-aircraft and our planes exist no longer. Two mechanized divisions of the enemy are pouring through the western gate. It is street and house to house fighting from now on. Do not surrender. This is official. You will be shown no mercy. The invaders are taking no prisoners.

The path of the invader is slippery with our army's blood. But it has been to no avail.

They fight like madmen and will not be stopped. The many sins, if a nation and a man's convictions be sins, of which we have been guilty in years past have come home to roost like buzzards on our cannons eager to pick the warm flesh from our still quivering bodies. The invader is no longer fighting for conquest. We were too confident, too arrogant. We held them at arm's length too long. They are fighting for their pride—and for their dead.

The world said that it couldn't be done, that the English Channel would never be crossed. Winston Churchill swore to the fact in the House of Lords. Unfortunately we believed him. Many men used the same misstatement in the United States of America in the vain hope of keeping that nation isolated from the theatre of war.

"How," was pounded on the speaker's desk of five hundred rostrums in the cities of that nation, "do the war mongers in Washington expect the National Socialist party to cross three thousand miles of water to attack us when they can't even get across the English Channel? I tell you that it can't be done."

If you are listening, America, I wish every one of you theorists were here now. I wish we had all remembered that in the year fourteen-ninety-two there were similar skeptical parties who made your identical remark to one Christopher Columbus. Remember?

It is all very amusing now if one has the heart to laugh. I am afraid at this moment I haven't.

They crossed the channel under a metal sky of planes that hid the sun—but not in the direction it had been anticipated. They crossed in their own ships recalled from the Baltic, the Mediterranean, and the high seas.

They crossed in captured and interned French, Norwegian, Danish, Dutch, Portuguese, and Italian vessels. They crossed in barges, yachts; in rowboats, motorboats, and scows.

A ravishing horde of hard-eyed, bloodthirsty monsters, well worthy of the leadership of a modern Genghis Khan, they have gutted the countryside from the moment they set foot upon our soil. No living thing, no blade of grass now grows where their divisions have passed through. The tramping of their legions shake the earth. Even now——

Inter-office Communication
N. B. C. Short Wave Listening
Post—Montauk Point, L. I.
3 PM, June 25th, 1943

There was an eleven and one half minute break in the broadcast at this time preceded immediately by what seemed to be a terrific explosion. All attempts to pick him up around the band proved unsuccessful until he came in again on DJD, 11.77 meg., 25.4 m. The broadcast continued as follows:

HEIGH ho. And here we are again. That was close. Rather silly going on like this but one just can't do nothing. We know we are to die. We have no hope of peace. There can be no arranged surrender. When they have passed, then so will we.

It is hand to hand fighting in the streets and in the houses now with our square or circle growing ever smaller. In one more hour, perhaps a half an hour, perhaps in fifteen minutes we, a nation once among the great ones of the world, will be reduced to a handful of babbling civilians begging for a mercy that will not be granted us.

They are implacable, our foe. They have been well schooled in bitterness and hate. We, who are about to die, fight on with what few weapons we have left after our great defeats in India, Africa, Russia, the Far East and the Near East. But our weapons are too few. Our once great air-force and army has melted, as the Persian poet Omar Khayyam said so succinctly: "Like snow upon the desert's dusty face." Our leaders, blind guides who strained at a gnat, have swallowed an indigestible camel.

The fighting is even closer now. The sky is red with flames and horrible with the screams of the wounded and the dying.

It is at a time like this that men and nations think of God, especially if they have neglected or denied Him. We have called upon Him but He does not answer. In this twilight of our evening He has turned His face against us. Our prayers go up unheeded into a blood red sky. We asked for absolution and forgiveness. He has sent us death instead; death, pestilence and famine.

Around me pot-bellied, sunken-eyed, little children cry for food. Take care of them when we are gone. Our sins are not their sins.

Our dead we cannot bury. They lay in stinking windrows in the streets as I have seen them piled in Prague, in Warsaw, and in Moscow.

A report has come to me that all our ammunition is exhausted but there is no decrease in gun-fire. With us it is fight and die. There is no surrender. Our weary, battered, wounded troops fight on with knives, with stones, with their bare hands. And still the tide rolls on.

They have been long in coming. They are here. Once the moment and the season was propitious the twenty miles of Channel was as nothing. It was a placid mill pond that a man might swim across.

They came from all the jump-off places on the conquered nations of a world. They swarmed through Norway, Belgium, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands. The ports of Cherbourg, Calais, Rotterdam, Ostende, Esberg, Ekersund, and Berger are rotting with their dead and ours. But they would not be denied.

And once our frontier had been reached and they had formed not one but a half a thousand bridge-heads we could no longer hold them. They were madmen fighting for their pride and for their dead.

They died by the hundreds of thousands on our mine-strewn roads and fields. They

lost plane for plane—and gladly. For every man who died, three more replaced him. The world has never seen before, it will never see again such grim determination to wipe one nation from the earth.

Now, our backs against the wall, we fight in the smoldering piles of stone and steel that is all that is left of our nation. We will fight to the last man. We have no other choice. We have seen their faces and we know. We are to die.

Three hundred and thirty-nine square miles was all that we had left of an Empire this morning. It has not been long in going. The invader is already inside the city. He is battering at us from all sides, devouring acre by acre, block by block, street by street, house by house, what little still is ours.

We're fighting now on Unter-den-linden, with our backs to the Brandenburg Gate. Stand by for a flash. A courier has just arrived.

Der Fuehrer has shot himself!

It is the end. But still they come intent on their revenge, the wifeless, childless, brotherless, merciless men from France, from Poland, Belgium, Holland, Russia, Greece, Norway, Czechoslovakia, England.

For myself, Jeremiah wrote my epitaph almost two thousand years ago. Jeremiah XXII, 19:

"He shall be buried with the burial of an ass."

Cheerio. Pip pip. And all that sort of thing. Thank God at least I'm not afraid to die. I'm still English. This is Lord Haw Haw signing off.

Inter-office Communication
N. B. C. Short Wave Coordinator
Radio City, New York City, N. Y.
4 PM, June 25th, 1943

Re Lord Haw Haw 2 PM broadcast. Both Rome and Budapest confirm the report. Berlin has fallen. Spearheaded by Czech and Polish Legions of Revenge, British and American troops occupied the city this morning. Can suggest a better epitaph for Haw Haw and the German nation. Hosea, VIII, 7: "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

THIS COUNTRY OF OURS—A great thought

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A story that is not in itself a history of the State, but that brings out some salient thought in its history.

These thoughts and ideas have been crystallized in a great new series that starts in our next issue. The first story will be about New Mexico, and is in the June 10th **SHORT STORIES.**

"THE ORANGE TREES"

(This Country of Ours)

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

"Right Now," Cockeye McDonald Told the Rookie Policeman, "You Got a Murder, a Motive, and the Way It Was Done. OK, Go On from There"

All The Answers

By H. M. S. KEMP

Author of
Many Stories of the North in General, and Cockeye McDonald in Particular

THE low-wing Junkers taxied into the wharf at Cariboo Lake, and a lanky youngster in the uniform of the Mounted Police got out. He looked around him, turned to a group of men who had watched the plane's arrival. These were men from the Consolidated's smelter, hard-rock men of the night-shift.

"Know a Mr. McDonald around here?" he asked. And with a bit of a smile added, "A Mr. Cockeye McDonald."

One of the men turned. Over on a pile of lumber was an oldish man, stringy, with a goat-like beard and a right eye that boasted a slightly outward slant. "Hey there, Cockeye! The cops are lookin' for you!"

The oldish man got up. He pocketed the jack-knife with which he had been whittling on a bit of wood and sauntered over. The policeman nodded to him. "Mr. McDonald? Here's a letter—from Sergeant Nettleton."

Mr. Cockeye McDonald ripped the letter from its envelope and fished a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles from the pocket of his shirt. Holding the paper so that the cloudy sun fell full upon it, he read what it had to say.

"Dear Cockeye:

Art McGregor has just brought in word that Blondie Larson has been drowned at Clear Lake. It is supposed that the drowning was an accident, but there are one or two points I don't like.

Here they are: Blondie met his death at about the time he was selling his interest in the trading business to his partner, Clem Hilyard; nobody witnessed the tragedy; and he was drowned at night. The bearer of this letter, Constable Rudd, is a good kid but green, being just up from the Depot. I've told him that you were a friend of Blondie Larson—knowing all the time that you scarcely knew him at all—and that perhaps you'd like to go over to Clear Lake and find out all about the case. The truth is I'm crippled with the cursed lumbago and can't get off my back, and I want you to accompany Rudd and sort of help him along. You did that for me once or twice and I appreciated it. So, old-timer—thanks.

Sincerely,

Bill."

There was a postscript to the letter:

"Play 'em close to your chest, for Rudd is the kind who would resent this action."

Cockeye shoved the letter deep into his pocket and followed it with his spectacles.

"So Blondie," he remarked, "got drowned. And Bill Nettleton figures I might like to go along with you. Well, I would. Can you wait till I fetch my blankets?"

Rudd, the policeman, nodded. "Okay. And I've got to borrow a set of grappling-irons from the Consolidated."

They struck off together, parted, but resumed company within ten minutes at the wharf. Almost at once, Pilot Art McGregor lifted the nose of the Junkers and set her in the direction of Clear Lake. They made the hundred-odd miles in a good deal better than an hour, and as the ship banked steeply, the settlement showed beneath them.

There was the deep blue of the lake, the half-moon clearing. There were Indian teepees, a church and mission-house, and the buildings of the Larson-Hilyard trading concern. The fur-post was at the extreme west of the village, the mission at the extreme east. McGregor landed in front of the fur-post and taxied shorewards.

At once a crowd gathered; Indians, half-breeds and a handful of white men. The whites came forward as the policeman and Cockeye stepped from the cabin of the plane, one of them to shake hands. Cockeye knew him well—red-faced, slab-sided Clem Hilyard, a mountain of a man and partner of the dead Blondie Larson.

Cockeye made him acquainted with Constable Rudd, and Hilyard asked glumly if the policeman had brought the grappling-irons along.

"Sure," said Rudd. "But before we go to work, I'd like a line on things. How about the office?"

Hilyard agreed, but the voice of Pilot Art McGregor broke in.

"I'll be leaving you. Got work to do up north. How'll it be I drop in again tomorrow afternoon?"

"Okay," said the constable. "We'll be all cleared up by then."

The office was a room by itself at the far end of the store. Hilyard, Cockeye and the policeman entered and the trader waved them to seats. Constable Rudd pulled a memo-book from the briefcase he had fetched up from the plane, found his fountain pen and primed it against his thumb-nail. He looked very important on this his first case, even though a trifle self-conscious.

"Now then, if you'll tell me what happened—and how it started to happen—I'll try to get the hang of it."

The beefy Clem Hilyard mopped sweat from his forehead with a red bandanna, sat down and began to load his pipe.

"Ain't so much to tell you," he began. "Blondie—that's Larson—was workin' on his outboard motor in the workshop when I went down to the village. Gettin' dark,

then; must have been between nine and ten. When he got the motor fixed he was goin' over to the island—that one out there in front—to get some moccasins he was takin' to town."

"Taking to town?" put in the policeman.

"Sure. He figured on startin' the next day—today, that is; and these moccasins, fancy ones, he was takin' along for some friends of his."

Constable Rudd scratched a few notes. "What was he going to town for?"

"For good. Claimed he had had enough of the North and was hittin' back to the States."

"Then how about the business?"

"Oh, that," said Hilyard. "Well, he wasn't in the business any more. I bought him out a week or so ago. He was just stickin' around till he cleaned up his personal affairs."

"You bought him out, eh?" observed Rudd. "Paid him for his interest?"

"Not what you'd call paid him," corrected Hilyard. "Before he left I was to give him an order on the bank in town. He'd cash it when he got there."

After a moment or so of writing, the constable had more questions to ask. "Well? You say you left him working on the motor. Then?"

"Then I dunno," confessed the big man. "I went to bed, like I always do—early; and Henry Muskwa woke me up about ten-fifteen by bangin' on my door. Henry's a Nitchie," Hilyard explained, "and he'd bin visitin' over on the island. Paddlin' home, he bumped into Blondie's canoe; and seein' it was adrift he towed it over to here and woke me up to tell me about it."

Constable Rudd scratched away for a few minutes, then asked Hilyard what had been his thoughts at the time.

"Same as they are right now," Hilyard told him. "Blondie got finished fixin' his engine, so he put it on his canoe and shoved out. But these new-fixed engines ain't always easy to start. I figure he was standin' up and tryin' to crank the thing, when he slipped and went overside. There was quite a wind, and she was rollin' good."

Rudd grunted. "Couldn't he swim?"

"Couldn't swim at all."

Cockeye, who had been listening in silence, waited for Rudd to ask the next and obvious question. When it didn't come, Cockeye took a chance and asked it himself.

"Didn't no one hear him holler?"

"Wasn't nobody to hear him," replied Hilyard. "I was asleep in the house and everyone else was down at the fire."

"What fire?" asked Cockeye.

"At the mission. An old warehouse, and no loss at that."

By the look he was giving Cockeye, Constable Rudd could be quite as resentful as Bill Nettleton had intimated. His boyish face showed it. He grabbed a pause in the conversation to dominate it again.

"That'll do, I guess. Next thing is to locate Larson's body. There's no chance," he asked Hilyard, "that Larson *didn't* drown? No chance that he walked off somewhere and didn't come back?"

"No chance at all." Hilyard was quite vehement. "Blondie's worry was to get out of here as soon as possible. Today was the day for him to start, and he figured on makin' Cariboo Lake tomorrow night and catchin' the mail-plane in the mornin'. Anyway, his stuff's all here; and up in this country, a feller don't get far afoot."

THE plane had left. Cockeye's bedroll and that of the policeman were piled on the wharf on top of an empty gas-drum.

Constable Rudd picked up the grappling-irons and asked Hilyard about a canoe.

There were a couple of them. Both were engine-rigged. "We'll use this one," decided Hilyard. "The other's Blondie's."

They piled into the nearer of the two and pushed out from shore.

"Shouldn't be much of a job," Hilyard offered. "If Blondie fell out like I figure he did, he oughta be somewhere in a radius of a hundred and fifty yards."

With the motor running dead slow, the dragging commenced. Occasionally the iron snagged on a boulder; more occasionally it caught on something that yielded but which proved to be a length of rotting fishnet or a water-logged branch of a tree. But at a little before sundown the hook snagged for the last time. Hauled up, it brought with it the body of Blondie Larson.

ON SHORE and on the wharf perched a morbid crowd of onlookers. These watched the grisly burden being towed toward them and gave help to land it. At the policeman's suggestion, Hilyard went off for a canvas tarp; and when the body was laid on it the trader decided that it be taken to the workshop. He indicated the building, midway between store and house.

The workshop was about twelve feet by twenty, housing a bench, a tool-rack and an electric-lighting plant. Larson's body was deposited on the floor in a corner and covered by a second tarp.

Wiping his hands on the seat of his pants, Hilyard faced the constable. He was grim, with hard lines about his mouth. "Well—" he said. "That's that."

Rudd nodded, equally grim. "Yes; that's that."

There was an awkward silence. The four Indians who had carried the body up now moved outside.

"Might's well go, too," observed the policeman.

The sun was now down; evening was coming on. Hilyard turned to the lighting plant, set the throttle and spun the flywheel. The motor caught, and up in the ceiling a light-bulb glowed. Lights, too, showed in a window of the dwelling-house.

"Sort of comfortable here," remarked Cockeye.

"Yeah," sighed Hilyard. "We liked it that way."

They went out. The trader closed the door, hung the open padlock on the hasp and led the way to the dwelling.

An Indian girl of twenty or twenty-two was cooking moose-steaks and frying potatoes on the stove. "If you fellers feel like eatin'," remarked Hilyard, "go to it. Me, I'll get mine later." He indicated a wash-basin on an oilcloth-covered bench with a towel above it and told the two men to help themselves.

For all his show of importance, Constable Rudd was still a youngster who had not fully grown up. He tried to eat, but made a poor success of it. Cockeye, however, had no squeamish qualms. The steaks were tender and the girl knew how to fry potatoes. But apart from a request to pass this or that, he was singularly silent; and when young Rudd pushed back from the table and lit a cigarette, the old-timer said he'd fetch the blankets from the wharf.

Darkness had fallen; and when he returned he was greeted with the information from Hilyard that a spare bed was in the place and that the blankets needn't be used. By that time, too, young Rudd was putting on his hat. "Good idea, Constable," approved Cockeye. "If you're takin' a stroll, I'll come along."

They went out together, where Cockeye remarked that the electric light was still burning in the workshop.

"I want to stop there for a moment," said the policeman.

Inside, the engine of the lighting-plant pounded rhythmically. With evident repugnance, young Rudd uncovered the body of Blondie Larson and told Cockeye to lend a hand. "I want to roll him over—onto his face. There now! Up with the legs."

Cockeye was in a better position to make observation than the policeman. He

watched the dead man's mouth. "Yup; he's drainin'."

"Then let him down again."

With the body covered once more, the policeman looked quizzically at Cockeye. "So he drained, did he?"

"Oh, sure," replied Cockeye. "The guy wasn't beefed first and then chucked into the drink. But there's credit for you in wantin' to prove it."

At the word of praise, young Rudd's smile was almost friendly.

"Well, why not? Hilyard stood to gain if Larson never cashed the bank-order he was going to give him."

Cockeye nodded. "Let's get out." There he had another word. "We can watch the house from here while we talk things over." At the moment and through the lighted kitchen window, Hilyard could be seen pouring himself a cup of tea. They squatted on the steps of the workshop, where Rudd cupped his hands and lit another cigarette.

"At first," he confided, "I found it strange that Hilyard went to bed so early that night and nobody heard Larson yell. But Hilyard says he always goes to bed early; and so far as nobody being around is concerned, the fire accounts for that."

"Oh, sure," said Cockeye. "The fire accounts for *that.*"

The cigarette came quickly from the policeman's lips.

"What d'you mean?" he demanded.

"Mebbe that was the reason for the fire —to make sure nobody *wasn't* around."

The silence indicated that young Rudd was wrestling with the point. "But that's absurd," he said at last. "We've proved that Larson was alive when he fell in the water."

Cockeye interjected two words: "And conscious?"

There was another silence, a heavier one. "Stay here and watch!" the policeman suddenly ordered. "I don't care for it, but I'm going to check him over." He disappeared into the workshop again.

A moment later he reappeared and closed the door.

"Not a mark of violence on him anywhere. Not on his head nor anywhere that I could see. His arms are sound and so are his legs. If he had been cracked over the skull heavy enough to knock him out the skin would have been broken or a lump raised."

COCKEYE tamped the ashes of his pipe. The next question he asked seemed to be irrelevant. "Ever run many outboard motors, kid?"

"Outboard motors?" Rudd seemed puzzled. "Sure; lots of 'em."

"Do they run pretty fair without a feed-line?"

"Without a feed-line?"

"Accordin' to what we hear," went on Cockeye, "Blondie was tinkerin' with this motor; and when he got it fixed, he set it on the canoe and started for the island. But what made him forget to put the feed-line on?"

"Wasn't it on?" demanded Rudd. "And how d'you know it wasn't?"

"Because I saw it before supper—when I looked at the bench Blondie had bin workin' at. You can see it yourself; it's there right now, mixed up with the tools. Moreover," Cockeye added, "when I went down for our blankets to the wharf I checked this motor of Blondie's. Sure; no feed-line at all."

A moment later Cockeye spoke again. "All through supper I kep' workin' at things. Blondie mebbe couldn't have swimmed, but he was young and active. If he was standin' up crankin' the engine and felt himself slip, he'd grab for something as he went—a gunnel or a thwart. My gosh, man, there ain't no excuse for drownin' account of fallin' out of an eighteen-foot canoe! I've fell outa lots of canoes; and though I ain't no better swimmer than Blondie and a lot older, I ain't drowned yet! Another thing—I don't suppose there's bin a fire here for years; yet

just the night that Blondie coulda done with a bit of help, a fire breaks out and takes all the help away."

Constable Rudd flicked ashes from his cigarette. "All right. You discount the accidental-death theory. Where's your alternative?"

Cockeye promptly accepted the challenge. "Somebody wants to do Blondie in. He knows Blondie is busy in the workshop, so he sets a fire at that old buildin' and hikes back here. He walks in on Blondie; and by some means we ain't sure of, he lays Blondie out and totes him down to the canoe. The motor seems to be fixed; the feed-line ain't so much to look at, and bein' under the cylinders when it's in place, this guy never notices it *ain't* in place. He carries the motor down to the shore and fixes her onto the stern-bracket of Blondie's canoe. He gets in with Blondie, paddles out a rod or so and heaves Blondie overboard. Then he comes back, lands, and shoves the canoe out a second time. Result: Blondie has met up with a little bad luck, and the canoe's located by this Muskwa feller, driftin' with the wind."

There was a longer silence than any that had gone before. Young Constable Rudd stirred uneasily. Finally he spoke to Cockeye in a level, deliberate tone. "Just why," he asked him, "did Sergeant Nettleton suggest you come along on this trip?"

The question almost floored Cockeye. "Why?" he repeated, and fought for time. "Well," he went on, "didn't Bill tell you? I knew Blondie Larson; and, nacherly, I'd want to find out all that happened to him."

"I see." For all his acquiescence, Constable Rudd was plainly unimpressed. "If things turn out as they may, it'll be rather fortunate that Blondie Larson had such a friend as you. A friend who would make a good detective. In fact," said the constable, "you should have been one."

It was Cockeye's turn to stir uneasily. "Prospectin' is good enough for me. C'mon," he said abruptly, "and meet the natives."

COCKEYE had been in and out of Clear Lake village a good many times during his years in the North. Heading toward the village, he asked his companion, "Ever play poker?"

"Occasionally," said the policeman. "And very indifferently. But I didn't come up here for that."

"Nor me," agreed Cockeye. "But what else is there to do? I ain't settin' up with Blondie Larson; and if a feller wants to know what's what in a place, he'll find out by chewin' the rag between hands in a poker-game."

They passed through the village. Dogs ran out and yelped, only to be silenced by shrill Indian voices. Came a couple of tents overlooking the lake, then a low, log house in a garden. Cockeye led the way to the door, kicked on it and barged in.

Five men were present, humped around a blanket-covered table. A hanging lamp shone down on them and on a sizeable pile of chips.

"Hiyuh!" cried Cockeye. "This is a raid —so pull them aces outa your sleeves!"

Cockeye was recognized at once. He introduced the constable.

"Havin' fished Blondie from his watery sepulchre," he went on, "we crave moderate diversion. What are the white ones sellin' for tonight?"

They told him, pulled up chairs and made room. One man quit; Nosey Watson, a man with a beak like an eagle and eyes like a fish, said he'd have to draw on his insurance if he stayed any longer. Cockeye took his place and Nosey stood behind the chair to look on.

The man at the head of the table, a bald man of huge girth and three chins, owned the cabin. "Keg" Syder was a retired trader, living it out at Clear Lake in preference to town. On his right was a human beanpole, "Stringy" Hicks. Next to Stringy sat a middle-aged man in city clothing but

without a collar who was introduced to Cockeye as "Mister Brown." On Brown's right was a prospector, Jack Lomas.

Keg Syder reached for the cards wheezily, dealt them, and the new game commenced. Between hands, reference was made to the drowning of Blondie Larson. Cockeye steered it away from the subject, offered bits of general information and collected some. He learned that Fortune had been grievously unkind to Stringy Hicks but had smiled on Jack Lomas. Stringy had been sick most of the trapping season with a consequent poor catch of fur. Jack Lomas, however, was selling his four mineral claims at Pine Rapids to Mr. Brown, who, in turn, proposed forming a company to work them.

Cockeye grinned. "More'n Jack would ever do—work anything! Now I suppose, Jack, you'll retire?"

Lomas, thirty, well-knit, and tanned enough to be an Indian, shrugged it off. "Not on what I'll make out of this proposition."

Brown gave a grunt. He was a brusk man, whom Cockeye told himself he could never love. "But you won't starve," Brown said shortly.

As a prospector, Cockeye had been a success; as a poker-player he was a flop. His pile of chips began to dwindle, and Keg Syder hinted he had lost contact with the game.

"I'd do better," growled Cockeye, "if Nosey'd quit sniffin' in my ear." He turned to Watson. "G'wan, Nosey. Hoodoo somebody else!"

As Nosey moved around the table, the city man, Brown, referred to the arrival and departure of Art McGregor and the Junkers.

"I want to get out of here," he told Cockeye. "Why the devil didn't he let us know? I'd have booked passage with him."

"He went north," Cockeye explained. "But he'll be in again tomorrow. Anyhow, what's one day more or less?"

After a few more hands Brown cleared his throat noisily and stood up. It was between eleven o'clock and midnight and he needed his sleep. As though at a signal, the game came to an abrupt end. The other players cashed-in, put on hats and coats and prepared to leave. Jack Lomas and Stringy Hicks were the losers with Cockeye, but Lomas hoped for another session the following night.

Keg Syder was rolling a wad of bills and stuffing them into his pocket. He grinned the comfortable grin of a fat man.

"The evenin' was plumb entertainin'. Tomorrow night can't come too soon for me."

Cockeye and the policeman started to follow the others to the door, but Syder called them back. "What's your rush? Set around till I make a cup of coffee."

Rudd looked at Cockeye; Cockeye nodded. They took seats in deep-cushioned armchairs.

While Syder waddled out into the kitchen to start his fire, Rudd glanced around him. The cabin was big and roomy, a two-room affair and fixed up for Syder's well-being. There was a rug on the floor, an open fireplace and pictures on the wall. Stretched out in the big chair, Rudd remarked that Keg Syder didn't believe in roughing it. Cockeye grinned.

"When you get that fat, you can't!"

With the fire burning, Keg Syder came in again. He sat down, loaded a huge calabash pipe and reverted to the matter of Larson's drowning.

"Too bad, y'know," he wheezed. "Blondie Larson worked pretty hard here; and then, just about the time he was due to get something out of it, this has to happen." He shook his bald head, and broke into a chuckle. "I was tellin' Jack Loomis to look out that something of the sort don't happen to him."

"What could happen to him?" asked Cockeye.

"Oh, nothin', I guess," grinned Syder. "Only he's comin' in for money too."

"Much?"

"Twenty thousand. Leastways, that was the value Millman put on the claims Jack's sellin'."

"Millman? John Millman?" Cockeye asked.

"Know him?" asked Syder.

"Sure."

"Brown knew him by reputation; and so Millman had to okay the stuff before he'd talk turkey. Brown," grinned Syder, "wouldn't spend a nickel for a cigar unless he seen the box it came from." The fat man went on to discuss the finer points of the Brown-Lomas deal, but had to terminate when the kettle boiled. He brewed coffee, then coming in with the cups he asked, "Where you boys stayin'?"

"Up at Clem Hilyard's." After a moment Cockeye added, "And that gal of Clem's, the cook—she sleep in the house, too?"

Syder paused, leered at him. "Huh?"

"Don't worry," soothed Cockeye. "I merely asked you."

"What d'you think?" snorted Syder. "A snappy-lookin' proposition like her—and a coupla bachelors!"

Cockeye sniffed. "The North is improvin'."

"The parsons are, anyway. This one here makes 'em toe the line!"

ON THE way home, Rudd asked Cockeye, "Why did you ask about the girl?"

"Just to see if she could furnish an alibi for Clem Hilyard. Hilyard says he went to bed early. If the gal slept in the house, she'd know."

Rudd grunted. "Then Hilyard has no proof that he did go to bed."

"And we got no proof that he didn't."

They reached Hilyard's house to find the place in darkness, but as they closed the door Hilyard's voice called sharply from upstairs.

"I shut off the plant, but you fellers can light the lamp on the table. Your room's straight ahead of you—to the left of the kitchen. See it?"

Cockeye answered, "We'll navigate!" lit the lamp and led the way into the room. At once, he and the policeman turned in.

The next morning at breakfast Hilyard asked how they had slept. "Fine!" declared Rudd. But when, following the meal, Hilyard said he had to go and fish the net for dogfeed, Cockeye and the policeman walked outside.

"What d'you mean you slept fine?" demanded Cockeye. "You didn't sleep worth a nickel."

"Too much to think about," grinned Rudd. "But Hilyard don't have to know it."

"And what did your thinkin' net you?"

"Can't tell you—for awhile."

It was a sunny, dead-calm morning, with the lake as a mirror for the island and nearby points. They watched Hilyard pull off in his motor-canoe, and when he finally disappeared around the island, the policeman spoke again.

"There's one man who doesn't seem worried about our presence. He gives us the run of the place."

"Mebbe he ain't worried," suggested Cockeye. "Mebbe his conscience is clear."

The policeman grunted skeptically. "We'll see." He went on, "I said I had a lot to think about last night. I puzzled over Larson being knocked out before he was drowned and just how he was knocked out. It wasn't by a blow, I'm sure of that, and up in this country it'd hardly be dope. But I have a theory, and I want to test it."

Cockeye scowled, but he followed young Rudd to the workshop. A few minutes earlier, Hilyard had fetched a paddle from the workshop, and the door of the place was merely secured by the hasp. Cockeye's scowl deepened when the policeman's interest centered upon the engine that ran the electric-lighting plant; and he was more mystified when young Rudd showed particular interest in the exhaust-pipe that led up through the roof. Rudd stooped over the

engine, squinted, then turned to Cockeye. "What do you make of that?"

Cockeye was still in deep water. Rudd's finger was pointing to a clamp that secured the exhaust-pipe to the exhaust manifold. "Well?" he asked. "What?"

"The screws. Look at 'em closer."

Looking at them closer meant that Cockeye had to dig out his spectacles. With their aid he discovered that there were cuts on the screw-heads, as though they or the clamp had been recently adjusted.

"What about it?" demanded Cockeye. "The screwdriver slipped; but it didn't do no harm."

Rudd was smiling, a very cheerful smile. He asked Cockeye, "Ever hear of carbon-monoxide poisoning?"

Cockeye frowned. "Yeah; believe I have. That's the stuff that kills men in automobiles, ain't it?"

"It's the stuff from gasoline engines that kills men anywhere." Rudd explained. "If I loosened that pipe a bit and you stood there at the bench working, you'd suddenly keel over without knowing what had hit you. And if I wanted you to keel over but not conk out, I'd have to grab you before you went too far."

Cockeye took another look at the pipe again. Plainly impressed, he said, "The pipe looks kinda rusted, but them scratches are doggoned new."

"But what do you think of the theory?"

"It'll do," said Cockeye, "till a better one comes along." But stepping out and closing the door behind him, he gave an indulgent grin. "Yup; you've the makin's of a right smart policeman. How'd you come to think of it?"

"The same way as the murderer thought of it." The young constable smiled cheerfully. "There are only three handy ways of laying a guy out—a club, or dope, or gas. With a club and dope dispensed with, all I was left with was gas."

Standing there and loading his pipe, Cockeye gave a thoughtful nod.

"Sure pretty simple. They knew that Blondie was goin' to work late on his motor, and they knew what gas would do. So when Blondie went out—mebbe to supper—they sneaked in here and fixed the exhaust."

"We're getting somewhere now," approved the young constable. "We've a murder, the motive, and the *modus operandi.*"

"Mebbe a couple of motives," amended Cockeye. "But nothin' to tie the murderer up with the crime."

Rudd seized on Cockeye's remark. "A couple of motives, you say? Where do the two come in?"

"Nowhere yet," acknowledged the old-timer. "Not the second one, anyhow. But that's all right; you go ahead with the one you got, and if this second one of mine pans out, we'll compare the one with the other."

But Rudd wasn't passing the point like that. "Why all the mystery? I'm investigating this drowning; and if you've any evidence, it's up to you to lay it on the line."

Peevishly, Cockeye told him, "Don't be a goof! And don't try tellin' me what I got to do. Right now and like you said, you got a murder, a motive and the way it was done. Okay, go on from there. But if I've got suspicions—that's my business."

Constable Rudd almost snarled at him. "And I'm not to know 'em?"

"No," said Cockeye, flatly. "You'd probably gum the works."

A FEW minutes later Hilyard came into sight from working his net. He landed, hauled a sackful of fish up the hill and called to the girl. When she appeared, he crossed over to where the other two men were standing. He spoke to the policeman.

"I've bin thinkin' about Blondie's stuff. Are you goin' to take charge of it? Or me?"

Rudd chewed his lip. "Where do his people hang out?"

"He come here from the States, but his folks all live in Norway."

"And a swell chance we'd have of locating them now." The constable made his decision. "Maybe I'd better take it and hold it till word comes through from Regina."

Hilyard went on to say that the dead man had disposed of most of his belongings, save for a trunk, his canoe and motor and his traveling gear.

"Let's have a look at the trunk," suggested the policeman.

Hilyard led the way into the house and to an upstairs room. He pointed to a trunk that was packed but not closed. "There she is."

Rudd examined the papers it contained, but Cockeye took the liberty of picking up a bundle of photographs. Photographs always interested him, and in this collection of Blondie Larson's one interested him more than the others. It was a photograph of a group of men standing around a diamond drill. The drill was set up in blackened timber and on an outcrop of rock. The photo was marked, "Rush Lake, '29."

Cockeye got out his spectacles for a closer scrutiny. "Old friends," he told the other two. "Includin' Blondie himself." He identified several of the other men by name, but remarked that this was the first evidence produced to show that at one time Blondie had worked for a living.

But the policeman had completed his scrutiny. "Sure," he said to Hilyard; "I'll take the trunk along with me. And if there's anything else of value, I'll give you a receipt for the whole thing."

They went downstairs, and Hilyard said he had to get over to the store. They followed; but Cockeye, instead of heading inside, sat on the steps and smoked his pipe.

The morning air was fresh and fragrant. Cockeye sat there as might any other man without a care in the world. But little by little a frown of concentration settled over his leathery face. He looked about him; to the workshop, the canoes on the beach, the island that fronted the settlement. Finally he got up and ambled into the store.

The policeman was paying Hilyard for a can of tobacco. He turned at the sound of Cockeye's footsteps but looked away quickly again. Evidently he was still ruffled over the slight run-in he had had with Cockeye; but Cockeye merely grinned and pulled himself up to a roost on the counter. Conversationally he spoke to Clem Hilyard.

"This Brown feller — seems like he wants to pull out today."

The big trader growled. "I hope he does. He's a cheap skate from 'way back when. The sooner he moseys the better I'll like it."

"Cheap skate?" repeated Cockeye. "But Keg Syder told us he was buyin' Jack Lomas' claims for twenty-thousand dollars."

"Buyin' a sure thing," pointed out Hilyard, "don't make him a Good Samaritan. Why, the chiseller even made Jack pay Millman's expenses to come in here and value the claims."

"He did? Then Jack," snorted Cockeye, "is a danged fool! Any deal I was ever into—"

"I know," interrupted Hilyard. "But this deal was different." He lowered his voice. "What I hear, Jack's in a jam. He owns other property, but it's all pretty well tied up account of lack of funds. If he don't want to lose everything, he's got to peddle off some of his holdin's. And bein' short of money, Brown's offer looked good."

Cockeye grunted. "John Millman don't work for nothin'."

"Sure. But Jack had little choice. To get the deal put through he flew out to Edmonton and hired Millman on the spot."

Cockeye risked Rudd's displeasure by asking Hilyard what might be a vital ques-

tion. "And Blondie—was he mixed up in the deal in any way?"

At mention of his dead partner, Hilyard's red face went sober. He looked at Cockeye as though trying to understand the meaning of the question. "Blondie?" he repeated. "No; he wasn't in the deal so far as I ever knew."

"D'you know if he discussed it with Millman?"

"Mebbe," allowed Hilyard. Then, "Sure he did—both of us did, right in the house. Jack Lomas brought Millman up and made him acquainted; and as soon as we knew he hadn't any place to camp—except by crowdin' into Jack's tent—we offered him the spare room."

Cockeye went out soon after obtaining these facts, and the policeman followed him. Grudgingly the policeman began to speak.

"Was that powwow in there another effort of yours to dig up that second motive?"

"I hope to tell you!" stated Cockeye.

"Then tell me," suggested the policeman. "I'd love to hear."

"Okay!" snapped Cockeye. "And to begin with, you'd better get a coroner's jury together. We'll need 'em as soon as we can get certain facts from a man who can tell us a lot of things we want to know."

"Who is he?" demanded the policeman.

"John Millman."

The policeman looked at Cockeye. "You think Millman is mixed up in this—that he had a hand in Blondie's drowning?"

Cockeye gave a chuckle of pure enjoyment. "John Millman have a hand in it? I don't think! Why, John wouldn't squash a bug! No," he said more seriously; "but John can fill in the holes in Clem Hilyard's story. Art McGregor's landin' here today, and I'm headin' him for Edmonton. Of course," Cockeye agreed, "Edmonton is a long piece from here, and I ain't too certain as to who will foot the bill. I will, if the worst happens. But I want you to write a note to John, and Art'll have to deliver it at once." Cockeye thought of another point. "Oh, yeah; and our Mister Brown. Hold that guy. Don't let him get away."

Constable Rudd glowered darkly. "And I'm not to know anything at all?"

"You'll know plenty," Cockeye promised him; "when you write the note."

PRESENTED with certain salient facts, Art McGregor fell into line when he landed at the settlement. "I've got to make a trip to Edmonton, anyhow; so taking the letter won't cost you a thing. And if John Millman is in town, I'll have an answer for you tomorrow."

Art McGregor was as good as his word. He landed again at Clear Lake at three in the afternoon. Cockeye and Constable Rudd met him at the wharf; and although the pilot brought in no letter, he engaged the two in a few minutes of animated conversation. At its end, Cockeye nodded to Rudd. "Now go ahead with your inquest."

The policeman was prepared. He had reserved the front room of Hilyard's house for the proceedings and had empaneled the jury. These were the parson from the mission, his twenty-one-year-old son, two half-breed trappers and a Government fire ranger. The sixth man was a last-minute choice—Pilot Art McGregor himself.

Rudd swore them in, then trooped them over to the workshop to view the body. Back again, he called his witnesses. These were everyone who knew anything about the case at all and included the much put-out mine promoter, Brown. The policeman made a lot of Blondie Larson's stated intention of going over to the island that fateful night, and called for witnesses to support it. Clem Hilyard was one such witness, Jack Lomas and Keg Syder were two more. Lomas and Syder had both been in the workshop in the afternoon during the time Larson had his engine to pieces, and both had heard him express his intentions. Keg Syder amplified the point.

"Blondie said he'd have to work late to

get the job finished, but he wanted the moccasins. Then again, a run over to the island would show him if the kicker was in goin'-shape for the trip next day."

Rudd next brought up the matter of the fire at the mission. He asked Keg Syder if he had been a spectator at the fire. Keg had, so also had most of the others. Rudd asked Syder to mention acquaintances he had seen there at the time. Syder obliged, as did Nosey Watson, Stringy Hicks, and even the glowering Brown. During this recital, Clem Hilyard stirred uneasily.

"Just a minute!" he broke in. "If you" —to Rudd—"are tryin' to make something outa this, the fact that I wasn't there don't mean nothin'. I was in bed, asleep—"

Rudd cut him off. "You'll get a chance to offer evidence when the time comes."

At this moment there was an interruption. The door of the living room opened and a man stepped in.

He was past middle-age, a big man with a seamed face and heavy shoulders. Though dressed for the city, there clung to him a definite air of the outdoors. Constable Rudd gave him a glance.

But soon Rudd addressed him directly. "Will you please stand up?"

The man stood up.

"Are you a stranger here?" Rudd asked.

The man smiled. "If twenty years absence makes me a stranger, I am."

"Your occupation?"

"Mining engineer and consulting geologist."

Since the stranger's entry, the crowd in the room had been craning forward to miss nothing. Seeing their tenseness, Rudd went on.

"In your capacity then as a consulting geologist, have you ever conducted an assay or examination into a string of claims on behalf of Mr. Jack Lomas?"

The crowd seemed to stiffen. "No," the man replied. "Never."

"You will swear to that?"

"I will."

"And what is your name?"

"John Millman, of Edmonton."

Something like an electric current swept the room. From the stranger, John Millman, those present turned to Jack Lomas. Lomas was half out of his chair, face set and hard. "What's all this—?" he began, till Rudd cut him off as shortly as he had silenced Clem Hilyard. Then he was addressing John Millman again.

"Mr. Millman, you have stated that at no time have you ever conducted an examination of any claims on behalf of Jack Lomas. But are you aware of a string of claims owned by Mr. Lomas at Pine Rapids?"

Millman bowed. "I am aware of such a string. In fact, I looked them over three years ago when they were first staked by Jesse Smythe. At that time I was doing some work north of there, so I took a run down to satisfy my personal curiosity."

The policeman wore a bit of a grin. "Were you satisfied?"

"Quite. The surface indications were excellent, but there seemed to be nothing underneath."

Jack Lomas was fidgetting nervously. Twice he rose from his chair; each time he dropped back again. Then Rudd was asking John Millman another question.

"Did you know Blondie Larson?"

"Intimately. In 1929 I was field superintendent for Aurora Limited. Blondie Larson was motorman on one of the drills we were operating at Rush Lake."

"So if you were to meet him in Mr. Hilyard's house there would be no need to—what shall we say—be 'made acquainted' with him?"

Millman smiled. "None at all."

"Thank you," said Rudd. "A lot."

A growl began. It came from mining promoter Brown. The man was purple-faced, glaring at Jack Lomas. Lomas, under his tan, looked sick. The policeman nodded to him.

"All right, Lomas. What's your story?"

Lomas made three attempts before he got under way. "Sure," he said at last,

defiantly. "Brown's a cheap, dirty crook. He stung me on one of his phoney deals. He didn't know me then, because the deal was handled by a broker. So this time I figured to get back at him. I would have done it, too. He wanted an appraisal made, wanted Millman to make it. He didn't know Millman, and I didn't figure anyone else did around here; so that was my chance." Lomas quit abruptly. "And what're you going to do about it?"

His color was coming back; he looked more normal. But Rudd's next question took him below the belt.

"Now tell us about Blondie Larson."

Lomas blinked. He looked around. His lips were dry. At last he managed to say, "Well, what about Blondie Larson?"

Over in a corner, Cockeye sighed noisily. The old-timer was clawing at his beard and looking unutterably bored. Rudd gave him a glance, then turned a blast on Lomas.

"I'll do the talking then. And see how close I hit it——

"When you sprung this phoney Millman on Brown, Blondie got wise to the scheme. He kept it to himself, for he saw money in it. But you wouldn't play ball. You kidded him along; when you got out to town with him you'd fix things. And Blondie probably agreed. But then *you* got wise. Why should you pay the bird anything when all you had to do was to shut his mouth for keeps? Which you did.

"You heard him say he was going to work late on his motor, and you knew Clem Hilyard would be in bed. That left the coast clear for you if nobody came around. To make sure nobody came around, you organized that fire at the mission." Rudd suddenly stopped. He asked Lomas, "How'm I doing?"

Lomas said nothing. Slumped in his chair, he looked up under lowered brows at his tormentor.

"We'll go on," decided Rudd. "As I was saying, the fire took everybody down to the mission—except you and Clem Hilyard and Blondie. Clem was in bed, and you thought that in the excitement of the moment your absence would be overlooked. But in the evidence the boys gave just now I noticed one thing—nobody saw Clem at the fire, but also, nobody saw Jack Lomas. "You," said Rudd, "were too busy with Blondie Larson."

Lomas fought himself to his feet. His face was a portrait of despair. "How was I busy with Blondie Larson? If you mean I killed him—how did I kill him? He was a bigger man than me, stronger—"

"But not as strong as carbon-monoxide gas."

Lomas broke. "Who told you?" he yelled. "Who saw me—" Then realizing his fatal error, he made a lunge.

"Watch him!" Rudd's command ripped out as he himself sprang forward. But Clem Hilyard, slab-sided mountain of a man, got there first.

Later, quite some time later, Pilot Art McGregor was getting ready to leave. With him were Constable Rudd, prisoner Jack Lomas, John Millman and a sobered Mr. Brown. Cockeye was staying, till Art returned and flew him over to Cariboo Lake.

"Nice seeing you again," Cockeye told John Millman. "Like old times."

"Nice seeing you," grinned Millman.

"Yes," agreed Constable Rudd. "And it was nice for me having Cockeye along." He looked grimly at the old-timer, there on the wharf. "Friendship is wonderful—I mean your friendship for Blondie."

Cockeye returned the look. "A more wonderful thing is luck. Luck that I happened to know John Millman and knew him for a man who'd never set a valuation on any property without drilling her first. Luck that I came across that picture of Blondie up at Rush Lake. But it wasn't luck that doped out the carbon-monoxide angle. That was a feller usin' his head."

The constable grinned, turned to John Millman. "Knows all the answers, doesn't he?"

Millman grinned in return. "And all the questions, too."

Date With A Convoy

By

EDWARD DALY

Author of "Dog Fight," etc.

"Shall I Stay in My Boat or Come to Yours?" the Crashed Pilot Asked of the Two People In the Ship's Lifeboat.

SNUG in the Hurricane's cockpit Tommy Whelan watched, anxiety momentarily overlaying his enthusiasm, as the inexperienced crew of the freighter prepared to launch him from the makeshift catapult. The Focke-Wolfe was attacking the last ship in the convoy; he could see the great geysers of water erupting around the already smoking ship and the prodigal efforts of the two escorting destroyers, spreading the convoy like a pair of sheep-dogs gone mad.

The chief engineer, a long-nosed dour Scot with a passion for Cribbage and the Scriptures, raised his hand to indicate all was ready. Whelan returned the thumbs-up signal, the engineer climbed up for one last word on the center-section step, Whelan lip-reading his words above the roar of the motor.

"God speed ye, Tommy," he said.

The thrust of the catapult always reminded him of a good, swift kick in the pants. That was the way it felt at the flying training school and that was the way it felt now—less accurately placed perhaps, but still a good, swift kick.

For one sickening second the Hurricane sagged over the end of the ship as the thrust of the catapult expended itself and before the motor could take over. The

Hurricane shivered and Whelan shivered with it.

Then he was away, with a solid grip on the bright cold air, climbing with speed, turning for the Focke-Wolfe with grim and resolute purpose.

"Tally-ho!" his voice rang out. His eyes made a swift canvass of the panorama of fanning ships below him, the freighters belching smoke, striving for speed and security, and the two lean destroyers, their guns harrying the efforts of the bomber, methodically destroying its victim with the wicked thoroughness of a hawk.

His fingers felt the trigger of his guns, lovingly, and he expended a short burst, just like it said in the book, to warm them up. He had the habit of personal neatness and he tucked a vibrating chinstrap under the edge of his helmet, afterward smoothing the helmet evenly about the contour of his head.

The pilot of the bomber saw him and the captains of the destroyer saw him. The bomber stopped bombing and the guns ceased firing. Tommy Whelan glowed with an odd kind of self-importance. In other fights it had been different. Always there was a flight commander, cautioning restraint just when the going was getting good, or a ground radio ordering: "All aircraft return to bases."

Here there was no flight commander, and by the same token he reflected grimly, no bases either. You either belly-flopped in the water with your ship or came down gracefully by parachute. There were two schools of thought; the frugal said try and save your plane, the practical said try and save yourself.

The captain of the bomber was refusing combat. At the indication of aerial opposition, he swung away from the sinking freighter and headed west as fast as his four motors would carry him.

"Whether you like it or not, brother, you're gonna fight," Whelan said through his teeth. He set about his first dive attack with calm, professional assurance from the vantage point he had provided himself with in the sun.

As he pushed the stick down, Whelan gathered the black outline of the Focke-Wolfe in the crossed lines of his Aldis sight and came down in one tremendous, plummeting dive on the bomber. The recoil of his eight guns sent a shudder through the straining ship; the flying wires and motor hummed a high-pitched song of vengeance as Whelan, fighting against the invisible force that strove to drive him from his seat, tried to hold the bomber in his sights.

"Damn—"

The German captain was nobody's fool. In the first place he clung close to the water's surface to add the hazard of the ocean to Whelan's diving. His actions were just as sure and just as professional as those of Whelan. At the instant his gunners reported the other had opened fire, he executed a neat flat turn, the Hurricane's bullets splaying the water behind him.

It was nice work, Whelan admitted grudgingly, climbing away. The speed of his descent had been so terrific that his fuselage almost caressed the surface of the water before he could pull his ship out. Lines of tracer bullets sped past him as the crew of the bomber tried to get him.

The battle lasted for forty-five minutes, Whelan diving and roaring away, trying to anticipate the wayward zig-zagging of the Folke-Wolfe, still pounding steadily, though a little drunkenly, on its westward course.

The bomber's two port engines were disabled and out of commission, the result of his incessant attacks. He had heard that a Focke-Wolfe can fly on two motors; from the manner in which the bomber was flying he enjoyed the satisfaction of doubting it.

Whelan was out of ammunition and could do no more. What he could not understand was why the other maintained

a westerly course. "Must be going to America," Whelan said aloud. America was nearer than Norway at that. "They'll get a warm welcome there," he gloated. The thought of America made him feel homesick and he watched the bomber below him, enviously and curiously. The Focke-Wolfe was in a bad way all right—

"Ah—" The other was turning, laboriously reversing his course. He watched with mechanical attention the other's maneuvering, stemming the slow flow of nausea that was invading his stomach.

"Well, the bloody louse," Whelan exclaimed woodenly.

A glance at his own fuel reserve told him why the German had lured him westwards. He stared with unbelieving eyes at the dial on his dash. Enough gas for twenty minutes' flying. Where the hell could he get in twenty minutes? Around him on all the horizons the blue sky met the empty limitless sea with only the Focke-Wolfe, now far away, reeling home in the distance.

He began busying himself in the tiny cockpit with nervous impotent energy. He thought of trying an outside loop. Some said you could outside-loop a Hurricane; others that you couldn't. It was one of those arguments like the irresistible force and the immovable object, which nobody could ever prove. Well, here was the chance to prove to his own satisfaction whether a Hurricane could do it or not. But his own satisfaction was no satisfaction; you had to be able to tell the other guys about it. "Shoot them down in flames," was the R. A. F. way of saying it and Whelan gave up that idea.

He took one last, lingering glance at the Focke-Wolfe, a minute speck in the distance.

"The lousy whelps," he repeated over and over again.

ON PAPER he was fully prepared for such a contingency. It occupied his mind to produce a sheet of closely-printed instructions just to see what some lunkhead in New York or London might think of for a fellow to do in the middle of the Atlantic wtth just enough gas in his tank for fifteen minutes' flying.

"If within range of the American continent or the British Isles," it said, "fly there and report to the appropriate authority."

"This'll be good," Whelan announced to himself, wryly.

Alternative two was to attempt to land in the proximity of the convoy to which he was attached, or, "in inclement weather," it said, to make a parachute descent.

Whelan skipped to alternative three. He read precise and detailed instructions of the day-by-day course the next convoy after his would follow.

For the moment he read no further. His mind made a rapid mental calculation of where he would have to be to meet that convoy, tallying its distance against the inexorable ebbing of his gas. "I can do it," he whispered hoarsely and swung his ship for the position that would lay him across the path of the coming convoy.

A small and tremendously insignificant office-worker in Whitehall—who had worked out Whelan's plan of instructions —felt his left ear burning.

"The missus'll be beefin' to the neighbors about me again," he complained to a stenographer.

The stenographer, a young woman who placed tremendous trust in cup-reading, palmistry, astrology and other occult manifestations said, "No." An itching left ear, in her expert opinion, indicated that blessings were being bestowed.

The office-worker shook his head, doubtfully. If anyone were blessing him, it would be a rare and engrossing novelty and he said so.

Whelan continued reading his instructions. Compartmented round the cockpit were provisions and stores with which he began loading himself. He had little time

to spare; his mind was fully occupied with the careful working out of his position and the very real hope that the collapsible dinghy folded up somewhere in the port mainplane would inflate all right when he pulled the cord.

The motor gave an ominous warning sputter. He was just about there; convoys mostly were two or three miles wide and his position need not be more than approximate. With pursed lips he stared down on the wastes of gently heaving water.

"Great godfrey!" There *was* a boat there! A small ship's boat, insignificant in

the immensity but a boat all right and with people in it. He could see the white fluttering of a shirt or something.

The consciousness of his own predicament left him as he read the meaning of that futile signaling.

"They're looking to me for help," he exclaimed ironically.

His motor went suddenly dead and he could hear himself talk. The speed from his descent gave him enough lift to make two circuits of the boat. He could see two figures in it, one of them waving.

He was almost on the water himself, bringing the ship down as slowly as he dared, the maneuver requiring all of his concentrated skill. As he skimmed across the surface, he ripped the cord that would release his dinghy, saw his port mainplane develop a gigantic blister and the dinghy suddenly erupt into being.

Plop! The Hurricane nosed under, came to the surface reluctantly and began to settle rapidly. Whelan shook himself like a terrier, crawled across the mainplane and into the dinghy.

The plane sank from under him and he sat there in the tiny rubber craft, himself loaded like a Christmas mail-carrier, feeling rather foolish as he looked around for the other boat.

"Ahoy there!"

"Ahoy."

The return hallo was weak and high-pitched. The boat was about fifty yards away, swaying slightly in the gentle swell. Whelan found two paddles, about the size of ping-pong bats, and began, with more energy than skill, to paddle toward the larger boat.

Gradually he drew nearer, the others watching his efforts in silence. One face, chin hooked on the gunwale, was that of a man, but the second figure in the boat belonged to a woman in the sodden uniform of a Canadian Army nurse.

"Shall I stay in my boat or may I come into yours?" Whelan asked facetiously.

The man did not answer but the nurse drew her greatcoat about her shoulders with a gesture of half-forgotten coquetry, answering Whelan with a gallant attempt at humor:

"If you know of a better boat, go to it."

The man's face had subsided again and as the dinghy drew alongside the boat Whelan noticed that he was wounded and only partially conscious. The nurse went to the far side of the boat, balancing it as Whelan, his parachute flapping about his thighs, climbed gingerly aboard.

Whelan controlled an impulse to laugh as they sat on opposite seats, the wounded man between them, staring at each other. A second glance told him that the nurse was almost at the end of her endurance; all at once he was aware of the small keg of water containing God knows how much

of the precious liquid, of the complete absence of any other food or drink and of her dress shredded to the knees to make bandages for the wounded man.

"How long have you been like this?" he asked quietly.

"Five days—I think." She spoke through cracked lips. "Its been pretty bad with my patient getting worse. No food and not much water." Her hands fumbled at the buttons of her coat. "I thought when I saw you that relief was in sight," she half-sobbed, "but you're no better off than we are—"

"Well, I may not be the rescue squad," Whelan admitted cheerfully, "but I bring good tidings. Moreover, I bring good food. Here—"

Quickly he dived into one of the haversacks about his shoulders and produced a bottle of brandy. On the label was an impressive warning:

"To be used in emergencies only."

That drew a laugh from her. "We put those on in the hospitals, too," she quavered.

THE wounded man lying huddled in a blanket in the bottom of the boat uttered a groan and she bent over to moisten his lips with a handkerchief. She was young and Whelan decided was probably pretty, but her eyes and cheeks were sunken in her wind-lashed face from long days of ceaseless exposure and privation.

He had the brandy bottle open. "Can he have some of this?"

"He gets it first," she answered with a trace of severe professionalism. "He's got a shattered thigh. He and I were shoved into a boat when our ship was torpedoed. We drifted away and then all of a sudden it blew up in one huge flash—oil or something, I guess." She pressed her hands to her face in the horror of her recollection. Whelan put his arm about her shoulder, forcing her to drink from the tin cup in his hand.

"Your troubles'll be all over by tomorrow evening," he informed her triumphantly. "A convoy will pass here, so close they'll almost run us down. I got a date with one," he cried. She looked at him in disbelief and he produced his instructions from their waterproof sachet. "Listen," he read.

" 'Rockets are provided in the haversack marked B. These are to be used to attract the attention of the officer in charge of the convoy at whose disposal you are to place yourself.' You see," Whelan told her happily, "it's all in the bag. Now," he went on with great cunning, "how would you like a hot meal?"

"You mean more brandy?" She shook her head. "Better keep it for my patient."

"Brandy nothing. Watch!" From another haversack he produced a half-gallon can. With an opener he pierced the lid. "I dunno how it works," he confessed dubiously, "but it's supposed to get hot in five minutes—and, by golly," he crowed, "it is getting hot. Smell that!"

"I can smell it from here. Please," she murmured, "if I'm to remain a lady—don't be too long. Irish stew, isn't it?" She looked for all the world like the pictures he had seen of half-starved waifs on charity seals. He kept his eyes studiously averted so that he could avoid seeing the repressed hunger in her eyes.

"Here it is," he said at length, "with a spoon and everything."

The spoon in one hand, the piping can in the other, she bent down over her patient, forcing the hot food between his lips. Alternately, she took a mouthful herself, chewing on the food with a slow exquisite luxury.

With an intuitive delicacy, Whelan studiously ignored them, busying himself with an inventory of his possessions. He had five more cans of food, water, three rocket flares and the bottle of brandy. In another haversack he found cartons of chocolate and malted milk tablets. It was a warm afternoon and he pulled off his boots, parachute and harness and flying

suit. The nurse turned to him once and smiled gratefully.

"Want me to open another can?" he suggested.

"Don't be so prodigal," she answered. "As soon as we sight the convoy," she went on, "we'll open everything and go on a spree."

All afternoon they talked, a long-legged American in his early twenties, a veteran of many dog-fights, and the prim nurse on her first and what she had begun to fear was to be her last trip from Manitoba. Her name, she said, was Molly Milne, and she took the trouble to tell him on many occasions after brief and horrifying consultations with a small mirror that she could, and often did, look human.

"I'm sure of it," Whelan assured her gravely, adding with a laugh. "How do women, regardless of the extremity of their peril, always contrive to bring a handbag along?"

Drummond, the wounded Canadian private, began to stir and she bent over him. He was an immense man with sunken bearded cheeks, Whelan noticing with satisfaction that he was coming back to partial consciousness.

"We'll open another can of hash in an hour or two," he said, "and feed him some more."

The soldier began mumbling and Whelan tuned his ear to get what the other was saying. He soon found out, for in a voice of growing clarity, the soldier began to swear. He swore fluently and with vigor, using a rich fund of profanity, never once repeating himself.

"Jeepers!" Whelan exclaimed admiringly. "That guy's been around."

Molly Milne dismissed it with a shrug. "He's getting better," she announced. "Do you realize, Drummond, that you're swearing at me?" she addressed him severely.

"Bushwa," said Drummond.

Her horrified laughter tinkled prettily. "After you've been in surgery a while," she answered the gleam in Whelan's eye, "you get accustomed to it. I nursed a bishop once. He'd have made poor old Drummond look like a choir-boy."

"Purple in cloth and speech," Whelan murmured.

HE SPENT the night huddled in the bow dozing fitfully, the nurse and her patient side by side together in the bottom of the boat, swathed in the billowing folds of his parachute. Even in the vast gray sea, the night seemed to be filled with tiny sounds, the occasional plop of a fish and the lullaby of the lapping water. Once he thought he heard another and more mechanical sound but though he strained his ears it never repeated itself, and he laid it to his imagination.

The slow hours passed until the morning light began to creep over the water. It had not rained during the night but a chill mist had laid an overlay of wet on the leather surface of his flying clothes; the parachute was a dripping shroud.

It was then that he saw the submarine; first a dim silhouette in the half-light, then, as the darkness vanished and the rising sun drove the mist from the surface of the water, with more clarity of outline.

It was some three hundred yards away, he judged. He watched it, narrow-eyed. There was no sign of life on the sea-washed deck, but the swastika emblazoned on the conning-tower filled him with foreboding. It was perfectly obvious to him what the sub was doing—charging her batteries.

He stared at it with lifeless eyes for a long time and then for want of something better to do, opened a can of stew.

"Wake up," he called the others softly, "breakfast is being served."

Molly sat up at once, the soldier more reluctantly.

"Ah, I see we're feeling better this morning," she said cheerfully to the soldier. "Good morning, Tommy."

"Mornin'. Here I've divided one can into three cans. Eat while it's hot," he

urged. "You'll find the atmosphere kinda chilly when you get up," he added suggestively.

Drummond's head slumped forward over his can. The others looked on in alarm, Molly laying a cupped hand under his chin.

"Still feeling a bit groggy, Drummond?"

Drummond raised his head after a moment. "I've been saying grace," he informed them in pious rebuke. "Always have. Ever since I was a kid."

"You ought to have been a bishop," Whelan told him gravely.

"LOOK," Whelan said presently, "we have company."

The others had finished eating and then stared open-mouthed to where he was pointing.

The long cigar-shaped under-sea craft was now clearly visible, its water-glistening deck high-lighted in the morning sun. Its presence had an immediate oppressive effect on Drummond and he subsided to his back again, groaning.

"What does it all mean?" Mollie asked timidly, adding with a repressed shudder, "I wonder if it's the one that sunk us. It happened just around here." Her eyes swept round the limitless stretches of water, finally settling in troubled fascination on the sub again.

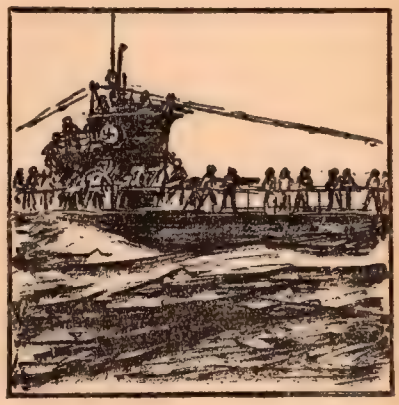
"I dunno exactly what it portends," Whelan said, biting a thin, sensitive under-lip. A man of action, forced into a state of thought, he vaguely resented that the others should look to him for guidance. "Ah," he said suddenly, "they're coming back to life!"

The top of the conning-tower was lifting, like the lid of some gigantic percolator, with the ponderous deliberation of a slow-motion movie. A sailor emerged, wearing a knee-length sweater and a beanie, climbed down the vertical ladder at the side of the tower and began pacing the deck.

"He's got a beard," Mollie whispered.

"All villains have beards," Whelan answered.

By now the conning-tower was disgorging sailors in a steady flow. When some thirty of them were on the deck, they formed in two lines and began doing setup exercises under the command of a petty-officer, whose authoritative gutturals rolled over the water to the man and woman in the small boat. An officer, wearing a peaked cap, visible only to his shoul-



ders, appeared on the rim of the conning tower. First, he took a sextant reading. Then with a powerful glass he began an exhaustive, meticulous survey of the horizons and the sky. Mollie laid a hand on Whelan's sleeve as the glass swung in their direction. Obviously, however, it was focussed beyond them and the pointing, accusing telescope swung past them, slowly.

His survey completed, the officer rested his elbows on the gunwale, giving all his attention to the acrobatic performance on the deck. Under the direction of the petty-officer the men were throwing their arms in the air in a gesture that suggested divine supplication, or the Nordic interpretation of a tribal war-dance.

The petty-officer began to berate someone named Guelph. The officer in the conning-tower began to scold him, too.

But Guelph was not to be silenced. Guelph had seen something. He rushed to the edge of the deck; his voice was hys-

terical with alarm as he pointed to the small boat, lolling in the near distance.

"It's the man with the beard," Mollie pointed out.

"I told you he was a villain," Whelan returned.

Organized pandemonium had broken out on the deck of the U-Boat. What might have been a war-dance in theory, now looked like being a war-dance in fact. What had looked to Whelan to be a bollard on the aft end of the boat, now resolved itself into a thirty-seven millimeter gun. It was quite the most menacing gun he had ever seen, Whelan decided heartily, and it seemed to be pointing right at the coldest spot in the frozen regions of his stomach.

The officer had his telescope focussed on them. They could almost feel its searching, careful inspection as it went over them with a sort of lazy, penetrating solicitude.

"Are they going to shoot at us?" the girl pleaded in a whimper. She stared, fascinated, at the crew, rigid behind the gun.

"Certainly not," Whelan returned with a heartiness he was far from feeling.

Drummond's brief interlude of piety was over. The sick man began to swear again. His delirious fluency appeared to act like a tonic on the nurse.

"Just the way I feel," she stated with new defiance. "I feel like sticking my tongue out at him. I look like a witch anyway." After a moment, she inquired thoughtfully, "What do you think they'll do with us or to us?"

The first officer had been joined by a second and a third, a trinity of watchfulness, taking turns with the glass. Whelan noticed thankfully that the gun crew had been dismissed, the whole crew now being lined up on the side of the deck.

"Apparently, they don't consider us a menace," Whelan stated thoughtfully. "We're entertainment for them—relieving the tedium of their lives. We ought to stand on our heads," he went on, cheerfully. "Ever been on a sub?" he inquired.

The girl shook her head, laughing shortly. "There are no subs in Manitoba."

"Well, I guess we'll soon learn all about it."

But the sub simply stayed, making no effort to come nearer, send a boat or to hail them. An officer was stationed permanently in the conning-tower and seemed to be forever watching them. Whelan realized, however, that the watch on them was merely incidental; the U-Boat was after bigger game than they and nine-tenths of the officers' time was spent in searching the farther waters.

Once there was a period of near-panic on the sub's deck. Some remnants of laundry were hastily scooped up, the crew dived into the conning-tower and the lid closed after them. Then she began to submerge, bow first, until even the periscope was invisible with not a trace on the blue surface of the ocean to prove her lurking presence.

A squadron of eight flying fortresses passed over at what Whalen guessed to be many thousand feet, on their way to England, flying in a loose wedge formation. The noise of their motors filled them with a strange sort of comfort. They kept up their frantic waving until the eight planes were far out of sound and hearing.

"Think they saw us?" the girl asked, breathlessly.

"Sure," Whelan answered with all the conviction he could muster. At such a height, he knew, it was almost impossible for them to have been seen. But he did not tell her that. "The convoy will be here, anyway," he assured her, "before they could send help to us."

"The submarine," she asked in a troubled voice, "would not know that the convoy is coming this way, would it?"

"Hardly possible," Whelan answered with a frown. "Course convoys have to go more or less direct—they zig-zag, but within prescribed limits—and these babies are

well aware of it. Our friend"—he pointed to where the U-Boat had disappeared—"is probably stationed right here. Saves fuel and all sorts of things."

"I'm not feeling very comfortable about it all," the girl admitted, dubiously. "What time is it?"

"One o'clock." For the fiftieth time, Whelan studied the figures he had made in his notebook. "Between six and eight o'clock this evening, they should be here."

CAUTIOUSLY, at two in the afternoon, the U-Boat appeared again. Once more they were subjected to a detailed inspection. Mollie was feeding shredded chocolate to her patient and Whelan, hands supporting his chin on the gunwale, as he watched the sub, narrow-eyed, had time to reflect on the probable price of their rescue. To pick them up, a ship would have to stop. The odds were, that it would be one of the escorting warships, and as sure as God made little apples, the U-Boat would torpedo her like a sitting hen. Had he been able, he would have refused rescue. But a man-of-war on convoy duty does not stop to pursue academic discussions of principle with floating derelicts. They would be scooped up, just as fast as willing hands could scoop them, but it would not be fast enough. He remembered, with regret, the Aldis lamp in his Hurricane, wallowing in the bed of the sea. With that, he might have been able to signal, though the U-Boat would probably have blown them off the face of the sea for doing it. Turning to the nurse, he asked:

"How's Drummond coming along?"

"He's got a pretty bad fever," she answered, "and he's swearing again."

At six o'clock, just as Whelan began to scan the Western horizon with haggard intensity, the U-Boat submerged again. He looked at the girl, answering her unspoken question, "Hell knows what they're up to." An hour passed and the long northern twilight began to close about them. Then, straining his eyes through the gathering gloom, Whelan gave a shout.

A smudge had appeared on the horizon, then another and another. The line of ships began to appear, fully fifteen miles to to the north. The convoy would miss them by just that much. "My figurin' wasn't so good, after all," Whelan grieved.

The girl stared at the long line of ships, barely visible in the half-light, with sunken eyes in which hope had been reborn.

"Fortunately," she said, "you have the rockets."

"Yes," he said slowly. "But you know what that will mean. A destroyer will high-tail it over here. Somewhere, within half a mile of us, there is a U-Boat. Maybe," he stated reflectively, "they haven't got the scent of the convoy, but if we call a destroyer we'll be handing it to them on a platter—"

Her hand leaped to her mouth. "I never thought of it that way," she confessed humbly. Her eyes turned again to the now almost invisible ships, in almost desperate longing. "Don't do it, Tommy," she said slowly. "Let's take our chances. Maybe the sub'll go away and someone else might see. Remember the planes this morning. They must have seen us." Her voice glowed with artificial enthusiasm.

After awhile Whelan said, "I think they will take us aboard, rather than let us starve to death. In the meantime, we're just bait, all ready and waiting. We're less isolated here than it at first appears," he said seriously. "This is a pretty busy highway, or waterway, if you want to call it that. There are planes overhead, patrolling constantly—"

"I know," she said with a trace of bitterness, "I've seen them but they never saw me."

"They'll be looking for me, especially," Whelan assured her. "And they know that I'll be along this track, somewhere, in a small boat. What I'm trying to figure out," he went on more thoughtfully, "is how we can put a little poison on the bait."

He was still in a brown study of thought when she bade him "Good night."

PROMPTLY, in the morning, the crew of the U-Boat, began their day with fifteen minutes calisthenics. Insofar as Whelan could tell, the sub had been there all night. Not once during the night had he heard the sound of gun-fire or the roaring destructive boom of a torpedo. The ship's officer, whom he had come to know as "Dog-puss" was giving him the once-over through the telescope. Whelan waved at him with airy nochalance.

Dog-puss did not acknowledge the salutation. "If you paid less attention to this one little boat," he murmured, "you might have got one or two bigger boats. Take care the little boat doesn't fix your hash."

Mollie sat up suddenly. "Are they back again?" she asked.

Whelan nodded. "They're our poor relations," he told her.

He watched her examine Drummond's wound. She dressed it with professional objectiveness as a good nurse should, a small frown gathering on her forehead. "He's bad," she said, when she had finished, "and getting worse. I wonder," she asked, facing Whelan squarely, "if there's a doctor on that U-Boat?"

"I doubt it," he answered.

"But there'll be some sort of a sick-bay, surely?" she insisted.

"Mebbe that," he answered with a degree of shortness. "However, I prefer to take my chances here in the boat."

"Ordinarily, so would I," she declared without heroics. "But better a live prisoner than a dead survivor. And Drummond, I'm afraid, is sinking."

Whelan thought clearly and quickly. Maybe the U-Boat commander would take Drummond aboard and leave the nurse and him. Perhaps all three of them. Then again, he might do nothing. They were no more and no less at his mercy than they had been for the last twenty-four hours. He was the trap and they were the cheese.

The sub was a couple of hundred yards away, and cupping his hands, Whelan ahoyed it three times. The officer in the conning tower and three sailors on the deck turned their full attention on him.

"We have a sick man here—can you take him aboard?" Three times, he roared his query across the water, the girl watching with a sort of somber timidity. They were aware of a short colloquy taking place within the conning-tower and then the officer resumed his stance, arms akimbo, on the gunwale, doing nothing.

"Maybe they don't understand English."

"It'll be the first submarine officer who doesn't," Whelan declared bitterly. "I guess," he went on, "Mohamet will have to go to the mountain."

The boat was oarless but he still had the two small paddles that had been part of the rubber dinghy's equipment. "Here, grab one of these," he told her, "and let's start paddling."

As a means of propulsion, the paddles were ridiculous and inadequate but they made slow and steady progress and within half an hour had halved the distance.

"Damn their hides," Whelan declared suddenly, "they're pulling away from us."

Noiselessly, the U-Boat had slid away from them, evening up the distance to two hundred yards again. Mollie brushed a lock of hair from her eyes and began cursing the U-Boat with pent-up fluent fury.

"Surgery work has its compensations," she ended defiantly.

"Now what are they up to?" Whelan demanded curiously. "Look at them go into that conning-tower—hell-bent for election—"

"It's probably dinner-time," she answered in disgust.

But the U-Boat was diving—a crash dive—settling under the water like a long lean cat.

"There's a plane around, somewhere," Whelan declared prophetically. "The question is, what sort of aeroplane is it?"

They heard the drone of the motors,

long before they saw it climb up out of the horizon like an angry hornet.

"It's an American flying boat," Whelan said peering into the sky. "Wonder if it's from Iceland?"

"Never mind where it's from," the girl declared grimly. "Start waving, brother!"

The flying boat, bearing the insignia of the United States Navy, roared over them like a great and angry gull, circling lower and lower until the down-tilted starboard wing was barely ten feet from the water.

"They see us," Mollie declared fervently. The boat began to rock crazily to her ecstatic dancing.

"Now if they can only get down and away again before that son-of-a so and so pokes his periscope up again," Whelan said, prayerfully. Frantically, he massaged his hands together. "Come down, you dog-gone fools," he roared at them in agonized entreaty.

The flying boat swooped and sang in celebration, but it didn't come down. Whelan wiped the blood from his mouth where his teeth had eaten into his lips. The flying boat dove straight at them, his head struck the girl's as they ducked.

A weighted message-bag fell in the bottom of the boat. Whelan opened it with fumbling fingers.

"U. S. cruiser, now eighty miles to your north," he read aloud and slowly, "coming under full steam for you. Hold your arms outstretched in acknowledgment of this message."

Mechanically, he held his arms, while all the strength and courage seemed to ooze out of him. "A United States cruiser coming here—why it's a death-trap!" The need for violent action became paramount and he began beckoning to the happily grinning crew, still circling them, inviting them with the frenzy of desperation.

The crew waved to them, the pilot fluttered his wings in a parting greeting and the flying boat was away, skimming over the water, Whelan's hopes for himself, his companions and for the fate of a United States warship, going with it.

"You didn't read all the message," the girl said in minor complaint. She had taken the message from his nerveless fingers and was reading: "Your position as of yesterday reported by aircraft en route to England. Chins up. Good luck."

"Good luck—" Whelan need a helluva lot of good luck." He stared at the empty northern horizon.

"It hasn't happened yet," the girl said with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Anyway a cruiser is bigger than a U-Boat."

Whelan looked away. It was this sort of feminine logic that drove men to drink, he decided. It seemed a good idea, anyway, and he took a drink from the brandy bottle. "Don't talk to me," he pleaded, "I've got to do some tall thinking and I'm not used to it."

After awhile, Mollie said, "If you're through thinking, our company's back."

The U-Boat's periscope had its unwinking eye on them from the point at which it had submerged. It surfaced slowly, the water pouring reluctantly from its deck and Dog-puss emerged with the inevitable telescope. This time, he did wave to them, and there was a wealth of irony in that wave that Whelan could not miss. He buried his head in his hands, once more. There were the paddles, of course, and he could wave with them but from his previous experience with the flying boat, waving did not seen such a hot idea. None could tell if you were inviting them or repelling them, and castaways in an open boat, rarely repel succour. For the twentieth time he cursed himself for not knowing the manual code of signals. With the paddles, had he known the code, it would have been a cinch.

The U-Boat was on the alert all right. All three of her officers were in the conning tower, the horizons shared between them. The first clue of the cruiser's approach, he knew, could be gauged from the U-Boat's behavior. It's like a death watch, he thought.

"What's to stop them sinking us before the cruiser comes?" Mollie demanded suddenly. "As far as they know, we might be able to give a warning," she pointed out.

"I thought of that," Whelan returned thoughtfully, "and don't for a moment think they wouldn't. But if the cruiser misses us, it'll go charging around looking for us and a charging cruiser is pretty hard

to hit. To pick us up, it'll have to slow or stop and then—"

"They're going downstairs," the girl said, quietly.

Whelan produced a laugh. "Your nautical lore is certainly profound," he told her. "Below is the word. Can you see anything to the north?"

"Not yet. I'm scared," she admitted, "but sink or swim, I'm going to try and do something with my face before I meet the American Navy—or Saint Peter."

The cruiser seemed to grow out of the horizon. Idly, he wondered if the U-Boat officers had seen it through their glasses or whether they had picked it up with sound detectors. It would be lying still, now, he guessed, with every motor hushed, waiting for its victim. They didn't even have to use their periscopes anymore, he remembered.

A sort of apathy came over Whelan as the great black warship drove nearer. He had the pilot's eye for distance; mentally, he clocked the distance off, nine miles—eight miles—five miles, she must have been coming at more than thirty knots, her wake fanning out behind her, like an endless plumage.

He glanced at the girl. Small sounds of woe escaped her, as with small mirror and comb, she tried to remedy the ravages of the last seven days. Whelan shook his head in glum amusement. As he did so, a ray of reflected light from the mirror crossed his eyesight.

Nerves suddenly taught as fiddlestrings, he eyed the mirror. A mirror? The morse code? He knew the morse code. What pilot didn't? "By golly," he cried almost tearfully, "I've got it. Give me that mirror!"

Seizing the mirror, he directed its refracted gleam as closely as he could approximate it, on to the oncoming cruiser. U—two dots and a dash; with his free hand, he shaded the mirror to make the letter, then: B-O-A-T. Over and over, he made the signal.

"Think they can read it," the girl asked practically, "at this distance?"

"Sure," he answered. "There'll be twenty people on that ship with glasses focussed on us. Someone'll understand—they gotta understand!"

MECHANICALLY, he repeated the signal, his lips moving in prayer, while the girl stood taut beside him.

When it was two miles from them, the cruiser suddenly reined like a plunging horse. At full speed, she almost keeled over as she swung to port; he could see the guns waving gently above her black flank, a pall of jet smoke billowing in her wake.

A light began twinkling from the bridge. "W-H-E-R-E?" he spelt out, aloud. Subconsciously, he admired the dexterity with which the cruiser was handled, charging, turning and reversing across the surface of the ocean.

"Submerged two hundred yards, west by north of me." He spelt the long message out slowly; the signaller aboard the war-

ship repeated the message with bewildering speed, the ship itself almost leaping with the crazy watchfulness of a mongoose confronting a cobra. "Correct," Whalen repeated, and sat down.

"H-A-N-G O-N," the signal came, tersely. The cruiser began maneuvering with elephantine caution, approaching the point he had indicated in a series of short, frenzied rushes. Visibly, almost, it seemed to gird itself, then it came on hell for leather in a straight line across the U-Boat's position.

The girl laid a nerveless arm on Whelan's sleeve as they watched the three ash-cans leap in a wide parabola from the cruiser's stern. The depth-charges hit the water in a trio of dull plunks, to be followed by three galvanic eruptions, and recurring tidal waves of water that almost swamped them, from the detonations and the cruiser's wake.

Oblivious of the sea-water that showered them, Whelan's knuckles shone white and bloodless, as he gripped the gunwale for support, searching for the ominous oil slick.

The sea composed itself again, white-flecked and placid.

"The sons-o'-guns have moved!" Whelan declared. His voice sounded like an accusation.

"I don't blame them," Mollie muttered fearfully.

The cruiser adopted new tactics. Long strands of fine wire trailed fan-wise over the stern, her helmsman still maintaining the crazy pattern of his steering.

"Those wires are electrically charged," Whelan explained, "if they touch the steel hull of the U-Boat, an impulse is transmitted and they have her."

The girl did not answer. Her face was taut and drawn as she stood beside him. The sick man groaned occasionally as though in tribute to the portentous struggle that was being waged around him.

"Ah—" Whelan saw the torpedo, leaping past their boat, three hundred yards from where he had reported the U-Boat. Instinctively, he seized the mirror. But those on the bridge had seen it too, and the cruiser reversed engines defensively, reeling back on her heels like a fencer parrying.

The torpedo missed her by fifty yards.

Then she gathered forward momentum again, racing for the torpedo's starting point, all caution thrown to the winds in her stupendous lunge.

The ash-cans poured over the stern in a steady fusillade; the fourth depth-charge brought up a geyser of oil, like some outlandish oil-strike welling from the sea-floor. It was a different kind of oil-well, however, for great hunks of jagged steel came with it.

The nurse turned to her patient with a weary shrug of resignation. The somber silence following so quickly on the tumult of crashing sound filled Whelan with a feeling of deflation. Mechanically he wiped his dripping face, glistening with sweat or spray. He didn't know which.

The cruiser chuffed alongside them, like a tired but happy warrior. A couple of sailors shinned down a rope ladder and sent Drummond aloft in a hammock. Whelan went last.

The crew reacting to the presence of a woman with true naval alertness, surrounded the nurse, to the almost complete disregard of Whelan who found himself confronted with a large, stern-faced officer carrying a diminutive notebook. He glanced back once at his own boat, strangely becalmed in the spreading oil.

"You would think she was the only woman," the stern-faced officer said severely, "within a thousand miles."

"She might be at that," Whelan answered.

The stern-faced officer tapped the notebook. "Your report can wait," he said. "Let's go over and see what she's saying."

Adventurers All

On the Reefs and Off

WHEN I had maneuvered my 250-ton "wave puncher" as close to the big Japanese steamer as the depth of water allowed, I gazed with astonishment upon the scene. The 7000-tonner was sitting as comfortably on the reef as if she lay in dry dock. Four derricks deposited scores of cases of kerosene oil into the sea. The Japanese captain was jettisoning five hundred dollar's' worth of freight every few minutes.

Outrigger canoes with purple colored triangular sails, crowded with stark-naked Dyaks surrounded the vessel. The cases of oil were hardly on the reef before they were transferred to the canoes and they were off to brown thatched villages hidden beneath palms on the banks of sombre, mysterious rivers. Every one of the canoes had sharpened kreeses below the bamboo floorboards. To stop their plunder meant diverting the pirates' attention to the two ships. I rubbed my bald pate and decided not to risk losing it. So I despatched an S. O. S. to the American revenue cutter whose job it was to police that part of the China Sea, then lowered a boat and boarded the stranded steamer. My offer to ferry part of the cargo to my own vessel instead of consigning it all to the waves was accepted at a price of two dollars for every can saved.

The next day the revenue steamer arrived and the work started and continued until the "spring tides" were due. I had made a pile of dollars for my owners, and a nice commission for myself but I longed to crown the work by pulling the big prize from off its rocky perch.

I consulted with the captain of the revenue cutter. "If you'll tow ahead of me, with the weight of my old tub on the tow-line we'll get her off and share the salvage. Is it a bargain?"

My American friend nodded his agreement.

The next day we attempted to carry out our programme and alongside a visible reef our two-lines tautened into rigidity. Through my binoculars I watched the big ship thrashing the water with her own propeller. She surged after us a few feet at a time. "The money is as good as in our pockets," I yelled through a megaphone to my confrere. But at that moment of premature congratulations another vessell rounded the group of islands that encircled us, and came rushing towards the three vessels. It was a salvage steamer from Japan. Four blasts from the siren and a string of flags fluttering from the Japanese steamer's halyards ordered us to stop towing. I became both blind and deaf. "You've just got to come off on *my* tow-rope," I said.

Suddenly my ship surged ahead as if released from the embrace of some gigan-

tic marine monster. The revenue cutter sprang forward and the next minute was herself on the reef, heeling over until her keel was visible. The Japanese captain had cut our towing hawsers. The arrival of their own salvage steamer had made it unnecessary to pay for other assistance.

I JAMMED the helm of my steamer hard over and she cast away from the reef. The wire cable that had been ahead of me ran quickly along the port side aft and became as rigid as a bar of steel. It held the strain. The position of the two small vessels was reversed. My vessel was now towing the revenue cutter, and foot by foot the lighter vessel followed on her bilge into deep water, and then straightened again on to an even keel.

Half an hour later the American skipper and I sat in my cabin with glasses filled with neat whiskey. "The dirty dog," I ejaculated. "Damn his eyes," rejoined by nautical pal.

A knock came at the cabin door. An officer from the Japanese steamer strutted in. He bowed. He had presents from his captain for the two honorable white sailors. He placed on my chart table a curiously-shaped parcel. I unfolded the wrapper expecting to find some priceless Satsuma ware. Two pallid hams were disclosed. A ham for the hardly prevented loss of a ship! I looked at the American interrogatively. Lost in reflection of the danger his ship had barely escaped from, he did not immediately comprehend the uplift of my eyebrows. When enlightenment dawned he nodded his head like a Chinese mandarin. I handed him one of the hams, and —seizing the other—with a well directed blow I sent the Japanese officer's head in his direction.

The American returned my serve, but before I could get in a second shot I was in the grasp of a jiu-jitsu expert who twisted my right arm in a very painful manner. A pair of sharp-pointed, brass chart dividers saved me from a broken arm, for with my disengaged hand I plunged it three inches into the most fleshy part of the anatomy of the very thin Japanese. There was an agonized howl from the victim of this outrage, a rush by him to the door of the cabin, and a sudden cessation of hostilities.

I wiped the sweat off my brow and massaged my arm. Through the open doorway I saw the oil steamer gliding into deep water in the wake of our opposition salvage steamer.

"Hell!" I said. "That is that. I may as well be getting along to Sandakan to discharge the oil I've got on board. Many thanks old man for all you've done or tried to do."

"Don't mention it, brother," said my friend. "I'm very pleased to have met you."

F. A. Turner.

Port Chepstone,
South Africa.

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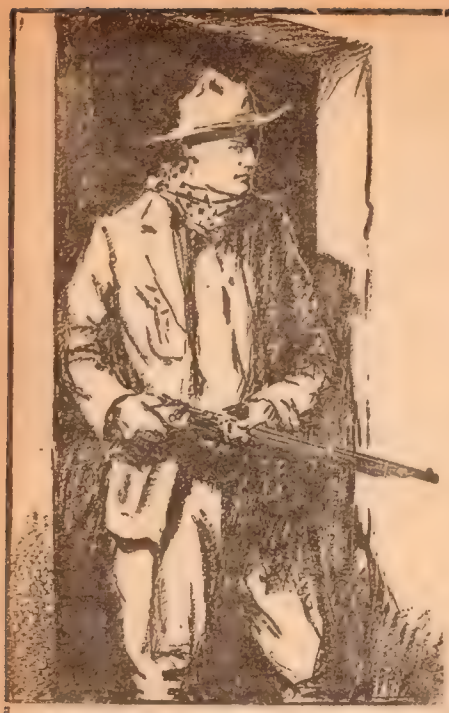

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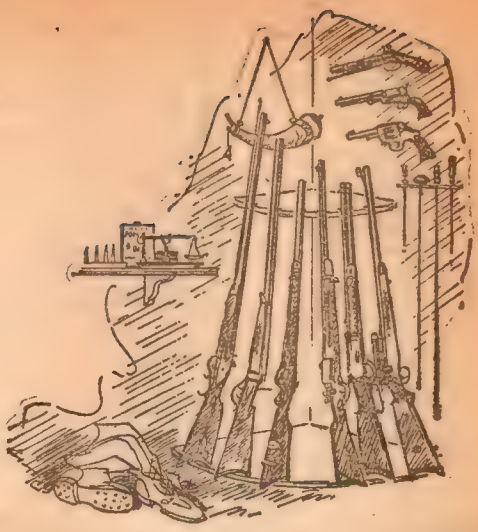


THIS AND THAT

Inventors Wanted!

IF ANY SHOOTER'S CORNER reader has an idea or an invention that may be of value in the fight to lick the Axis, Uncle Sam wants to hear about it! The Government is inviting anyone who thinks he has something of value to submit it to the National Inventors Council, Commerce Building, Washington, D. C., with the assurance that it will receive the consideration it merits and be handled confidentially. The Council acts as a clearing house for defense ideas and inventions, carefully considers all ideas, and passes along the more promising ones (with recommendations) to the arm of the service most likely to find them of value. In addition to ideas of direct interest to the Army and Navy, the NIC will consider aviation inventions if they have potential value.

Recompense is outside the sphere of the NIC and is taken care of by the department receiving the idea or invention. Legislation has established the legal basis (either purchase or licensing) for Government compensation for inventions, though certain rules must be observed.

So come on out of hiding with those ideas that have been simmering all these years. You may have something that will help us put the Ratzis and the Yaps in their places. And now's the time to tell Uncle Sam about it!

Rifle Accuracy in 1814

"I never in my life saw better rifles (or men who shot better) than those made in America. . . . I am not going to relate anything respecting the American war; but to mention one instance as a proof of most excellent skill of an American rifleman. If any man shows me an instance of better shooting, I will stand corrected.

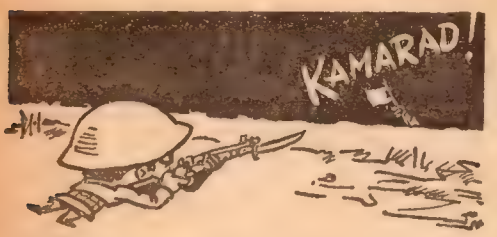
"Colonel, now General Tarleton, and myself, were standing a few yards out of a wood, observing the situation of a part of the enemy which we intended to attack. Our orderly-bugler stood behind us. A rifleman passed over the mill dam, evidently observing two officers, and laid himself down on his belly; for, in such positions, they always lie, to take a good shot at a long distance. He took a deliberate and cool shot at my friend and me, and the bugle-horn man. Now, observe how well this fellow shot. I can positively assert that the distance he fired from, at us, was full four hundred yards. Colonel Tarleton's horse and mine, I am certain, were not anything like two feet apart. A rifle ball passed between him and me; looking directly to the mill, I evidently observed the flash of the powder. I directly said to my friend, 'I think we had better move, or we shall have two or three of these gentlemen, shortly, amusing themselves at our expense!' The words were hardly out of my mouth, when the bugle-horn man, behind us, and directly central, jumped off his horse, and said, 'Sir, my horse is shot.' The horse staggered, fell down, and died."
—Colonel George Hangar, London. 1814.

. . . And in 1942

"In recent years the rifles as a war weapon has been overshadowed in some of our minds by the great amount of publicity given to airplanes, machine-guns, tanks, bombs, and all the clattering panoply of modern mechanized armies. We have even been told since 1918 that 'future wars will be won in the air.' But, as one blunt commentator puts it, 'Hitler wants the earth; and he'll jolly well have to come down to the earth to get it.' That is the truth. All these other things are preparation. The infantry are the backbone of any army, and they have the final word.

"Nowadays we have all of the machine-guns we need; but every infantry soldier cannot carry a machine-gun, nor could he carry ammunition to use it more than a few minutes; nor even if that were possible could any country supply the colossal quantities of ammunition that would be necessary. The only known weapon suitable for the individual soldier is the plain magazine rifle, and he can carry so comparatively little ammuni-

tion with him—for it is heavy stuff—that his job should be to make every bullet hit something worthwhile.



"As for the result—well, never mind. We won the last war. We shall again. But how much easier it *could* be. Nobody knows what a whole army of really expert shots could do in the field. There never has been such a thing!"—A. G. Banks, *The Rifleman,* London, March, 1940.

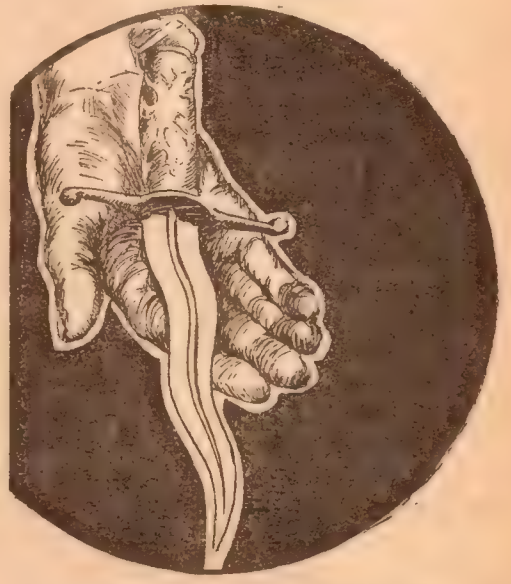
Ammunition Restrictions

Under existing orders of the War Production Board, manufacturers are permitted to distribute through regular trade channels during 1942 seventy per cent of the sporting ammunition distributed through those channels in 1940. The order does not apply to individual calibers or loads but to total tonnage of raw materials involved. The companies can adjust the proportions of various cartridges in order to best meet the current demand. The existing limitations are not such as to create any serious shortage of the more popular calibers if the jobbers, dealers and the shooting public will sincerely cooperate to make the available ammunition go as far as possible. There has been, unfortunately, hoarding by some dealers and by some shooters. Reports have been received of dealers demanding higher prices. These conditions are not general. Wherever they exist, local shooters should do what they can to point the finger of scorn at the individual responsible. There is now enough ammunition to allow shooters a reasonable amount of recreation, and to permit of a reasonable training program for men who will soon be called to colors. The real sportsman will cooperate with the dealers honestly trying to ration his stock.

Home Guard Training

A new booklet, "Pistol Training Manual For Guards and Auxiliary Police" has been prepared by the National Rifle Association as another of its series for Home Guard units. The text and illustrations are slanted to give the pistol instructor a simple, uniform training course, designed to turn out a maximum number of qualified marksmen with a minimum of instruction hours. Every civilian guard member charged with pistol instruction will want at least one copy. While not written as a text, it should prove valuable in the hands of the trainees themselves as well as for the use of instructors. They may be obtained from the National Rifle Association, 1600 Rhode Island Avenue, Washington, D. C. The price is twenty-five cents a copy.

The Story Tellers' Circle



Master of Dragons

THE unwritten law of the Intelligence Service is that when an operator gets himself into a jam, he has to extricate himself without crying to Uncle Sam. He knows that some traitors are mercenary, some are thrill seekers and a percentage are sincere fanatics. He has to sort them out, and at all times act on his own. The tense

situations into which this path leads him is brought out in the E. Hoffmann Price novelette in this SHORT STORIES. Incidentally, Mr. Price forwarded us a newspaper clipping of as late a date as February of this year telling of how FBI agents in a California round-up of dangerous enemy aliens, and acting on records from the files of Army and Navy intelligence, were seeking leaders of Japanese secret organizations including the notorious Black Dragon Society. You readers of the Price story, *Master of Dragons,* will know something about that particularly notorious band of cutthroats.

As for E. Hoffmann Price himself, we are glad to print:

E. Hoffmann Price: Fictionized by Himself

INASMUCH as my birth date is July 3, 1898, I spend odd moments wondering when I'll be shouldering a musket instead of supporting two wives, a son, and a daughter. It was simpler, back in 1917, when I enlisted in the 15th U. S. Cavalry and sailed for Manila, via Pearl Harbor and Guam.

Being somewhat under draft age in those balmy days, twenty-five years ago, I was suspected of patriotism in enlisting. The truth of it was that I had staked a drunken alleged ex-marine to coffee and sinkers, and he had expressed his gratitude by telling me some tall yarns about the Islands, so, not having any taste for the mess and mud in France, I decided to head for the far east and drink nipa gin, and become a sunshiner, after the pattern of that sottish ex-hero in San Jose, California. Not that it makes any difference, but I was born in Fowler, down in the raisin belt of California, and went to high school in San Jose, following the usual routine of the under privileged: to wit, picking prunes during the summer vacations, jerking soda, delivering newspapers, and finally, wearing a gorgeous green uniform while standing at the ticket chopper at the door of the Liberty Theater. In those days we didn't know we were under-privileged.

Perhaps a year at State Teachers' College nudged me into the Army. Polishing a saber and grooming a horse, as well as being a part-time sunshiner did, after all, sound better than herding someone's brats through our Moorish palaces which we call schools.

It was a nice trip. Manila was nice. So were the *bailarinas* at Caloocan and Santa Ana and other dance halls. But I damn soon found out that a John Recruit in time of war got very little chance as an apprentice sunshiner. Worse than that, when I applied for a transfer to the 15th Infantry which was then stationed in China, I was told to forget it, we'd be going back to the States very soon, and this was all too true.

There followed some service on the Mexican Border, and then a cruise to France. The 15th Cavalry traveled too much to have any time for combat, though we did convoy a number of mules up to the front. I was in Bayonne, France, when the Armistice was signed. Later, with nothing to do and all day to do it in, my latent urges for scholarship cropped up, so I applied for a transfer to (1)—a cooks and bakers' school; (2)—the A.E.F. University; (3)—the training camp for candidates for West Point. Oddly enough, I got the last assignment, and was number eight on the list of seventeen who passed the exams.

Nothing much happened during the four years at West Point, except that I turned out to be the best pistol shot on the dueling sword team, and the best fencer on the pistol team: as usual, somewhere in the middle on both teams, though making the first string was some satisfaction. And I was graduated a reasonable distance from the top, being commissioned in the Coast Artillery.

That didn't last long. A not-so grand total of seven years in various military grades was followed by eight years as superintendent of an acetylene plant. And

not being the world's best superintendent I was edged out, in favor of my former assistant; he wasn't any better, but he worked for $50 a month less, and maybe you remember how big fifty bucks looked to any corporation in 1932.

Fortunately, I had combined fiction writing with acetylene compression. Eight years of selling yarns to *Weird Tales* gave me an ace in the hole. In the ten years following, I have turned out a number of stories; number 400 being half done at this moment. Something like 350 have sold, including a number of serials, a few Scandinavian translations which were paid for, and some Spanish translations—published in Latin America—which were not paid for. In fact, I'd never have heard of them but for a letter from Robert S. Carr, now a Walt Disney executive, and then a publicity manager in Moscow, U.S.S.R., who in some weird way got hold of the Spanish versions and indignantly demanded why the hell I didn't stick to English!

So after a misspent youth and a contented middle age, I am wondering what to do about MacArthur. He was superintendent at West Point during my time. My fiction output lags, because I'm writing too many letters to senators demanding that they send strong equipment to back him up in Australia. In fact, if they don't send good men with the expedition, I may have to organize it myself.

Someone came out in print recently saying MacArthur is the best general since Pershing; others, the best since Grant. That's magnificent understatement, brethren—he's the best since Washington, and perhaps the best since Tamerlane!

But they insist that I talk about myself: all right. Until the tire shortage, motoring was my hobby. I've booted everything from a civilian "jeep" to a Hispano-Suiza, and I drove to Mexico City before the highway was completed. Today, the candid camera takes up lots of my time. Absolutely no vices, now that Demerara rum and Spanish sherry are going up and up and up; thank God, we distill a potable brandy out here on the coast, and one can still get a good cigar, and Bull Durham is a grand smoke. And I still don't know whether it'll be a musket or a typewriter for 1942!

E. Hoffmann Price.

On Lookout

RECENTLY this letter came to us from Caddo Cameron, from Grass Mountain Lookout, Angeles National Forest.

"You will note from the above address that I finally found a branch of Uncle Sam's service for which a cripple like myself is not unsuited. There being a war on I kinda wanted to do something. The Forest Service accepted me as forest guard, plane spotter, etc., and we are now sitting a-straddle of a 4,700-foot mountain away out yonder where there ain't nothing but distance and scenery. No mail except when a service truck grinds its way up here—maybe once a month, no electricity, no running water—it's hauled in, and nothing to keep a fellow from writing when he gets used to day sleeping. My wife stands the day watch, I take the night. Since we wanted to remain in this district we will have to do relief duty until a permanent location is available."

With this letter Mr. Cameron sent some sidelights on his story *The Devil's Master* in this issue:

A word to those who know the modern Mexican and, therefore, may properly feel that I have made my Indian, Dominga Zala, too primitive in the matter of religious beliefs:

These Red Doane stories are laid in the Seventies. Domingo was introduced as a mountain or "back country" Indian who had recently fled to the city to escape punishment for certain crimes and in a later yarn we will return him to his home range so that you may meet his people and observe the conditions under which they then

lived. In the meantime, however, let's take a slant at their religion.

A scientist traveling and writing in the middle Seventies, has said, "Though nominally Christians, the Indians are mainly pagans."

According to other writers of the same period, he did them something of an injustice, for, within the limits of their understanding they were actually devout Christians. True, many cherished their old idols and worshiped them in secret. But, to me the amusing and somewhat touching thing is the fact that, without prejudice, they adopted the new saints, (it is written that there were three hundred sixty-five in the Mexican calendar), had their old gods moved over so as to make room for them and honored many of the newcomers with *fiestas* or holidays. They were especially good at making *fiesta* and it is said that they entertained a particular hatred for the traitor Judas.

In the cities on Good Friday, they gave him the works. As one author describes such festivities, "All day long men are parading the streets with effigies of the betrayer hanging from poles and hundreds are sold, especially to the children, who blow up these images with a gusto and delight only paralleled by our small boy on the Fourth of July. Each image, made of *papier-mache,* is filled with explosives and has a fuse like a fire-cracker, which is touched off by the juveniles amid great rejoicing. The thing culminates at evening when immense Judases are hung up in prominent places, generally at the intersection of the streets, and exploded in the presence of delighted crowds. Then, also, the bells in the towers ring out their chorus of rejoicing and a peculiar apparatus makes a loud, crackling noise, which the crowds understand well to mean the breaking of the bones of the thieves on the cross."

I do not vouch for the truth of the foregoing. I merely cite it as an illustration of the manner in which the child-like Indian received the new belief and, with characteristic hospitality, made a place for it on the altars of his old idols.

Caddo Cameron.

With the Hunters

H. S. M. KEMP has had many stories in SHORT STORIES—one of his best Northerns, *All the Answers,* is in this issue —and many times odd bits about hunts and hunters have crept into them. In a recent letter he wrote that inasmuch as he liked big game hunting so much it gave him pleasure to share it with others—which is the reason that every season sees a new chum introduced to his old crowd at the hunting camp. This year the new chum was "Doc" Hyer. Here's Kemp's letter to give you the rest of it:

"You should know Doc. He is one of the American bomber-pilots on service in Canada under the Commonwealth Air Training Plan and a happy-go-lucky guy who'd rather hunt than eat. He must be; each Fall he hunts 'down home' in Pennsylvania, where, it is reputed, men in their thousands go hunting to get used to bullets whistling around them and to prepare for warlike conditions generally. Doc was taken along with us to be introduced to a new sort of hunting ground—one that ran all the way to the Barrens. His choice of game was to be caribou, moose, elk or jumper.

"Now all that follows is one for the little red book. The hunting ground came fully up to Doc's expectations, but game was as rare as feathers on a toad. Day

after day we bulled the bush, tempers growing more ragged all the time as we sought something on which to draw a bead. What had happened we never found out. Possibly the game had hit for the Park; possibly they heard Doc was coming and had lit out on general principles. But whatever the cause, game just wasn't there. Doc, however, had his own ideas —our technique was wrong. Plaintively he told us: 'I wouldn't have you boys think I'm another Yank teaching you how to do things, but I wish you'd give my system a whirl. That is, sit down on a stump, let one of the other fellers play "dog" for you and shoot the game when it comes along.' That was all right at first, but after the twentieth repetition, it sort of jarred. We gnashed our teeth at him. Shoot what? And what sort of game had he got in mind—chickadees, or squirrels? In any event, this sitting on a stump wasn't the way to hunt our sort of game. Deer, moose or flagtail, there's but one thing to do: get on their tracks and hang there. A moose may take you into the first bog and remain there for days; jumpers are probably watching you from behind a nearby clump of spruce; elk you'll overhaul when they bed down for the evening. In no case do you 'sit on a stump' and 'let 'em come along.'

"But Doc finally had his own way. He and Alf went out together the next morning; and after some persuasion, Alf allowed himself to play dog for Doc. You may guess the rest. In that cleaned-out country where there were scads of rabbits, ravens and timber wolves but nothing that carried a horn, Doc got his jumper before he had warmed that stump for thirty seconds! It came right at him, a flagtail buck, obligingly put up by the human 'dog.'

"Over the liver-and-onions that night—hitherto we'd been eating beef—Doc demurely asked us: 'Don't you think my system pays?'

"Pennsylvania, here we come!"

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ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB

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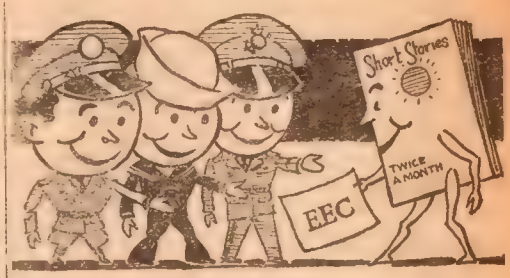

Welcome Texas

Dear Secretary:

I would like to become a member of your Ends of the Earth Club if you can manage to crowd in a Texan.

I've been in the R.C.A.F. for six months and am enlisted as wireless operator, air-gunner, just plain "Wag" to the initiated, and am at present on my tour of security ground duty in Scoudouc.

I've seen a lot of the world between here and Mexico City, Mexico, and should qualify for your organization.

I'm sort of a redhead, five feet nine inches, twenty-four years old, single yet, enjoy all sports, and find it hard to get along without my once regular hunting and fishing trips.

I speak and write fairly good Mexican language, having lived on the border most of my life.

We boys are kept pretty busy most of the time, but I get a kick out of writing letters, fills up any spare time I have. I don't collect anything except experiences, and if I can shed any light for any reader, I'm always handy.

Sincerely,

"Tex."

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Scoudouc, N. B.

Collects "Hot Jazz Phonograph Records"

Dear Secretary:

I have read SHORT STORIES for the last few months and should like to be enrolled in the Ends of the Earth Club. A member of the former Virginia National Guard, I am at present time stationed at Fort Monmouth, N. J. My home address is 639 Virginia Ave., Norfolk, Va. However, that will not be my address until February, 1942; if then. My organization is the 29th Signal Co., 29th Division, Fort Meade, Md.

My hobbies are photography and the collection of hot jazz phonograph records. My vocation (civilian) is cable splicing. In the Army I install and repair local battery phones and switchboards. Age, 21 years.

Sincerely yours,
Pvt. Alfred B. Hilton.
639 Virginia Ave.,
Norfolk, Va.

With Best Wishes for Continued Traveling

Dear Secretary:

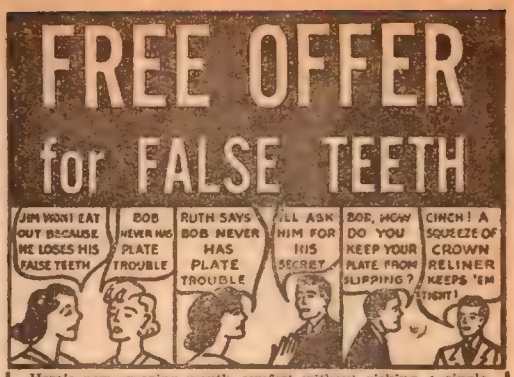
Since joining the U. S. Air Corps way back in 1939, I have traveled so much that I feel that I am qualified to be a member of your club.

In 1939 when I joined the Air Corps, I was first sent to West Point, N. Y., from there I was shipped to Langley Field, then to Puerto Rico, and finally to the British West Indies. Of course my traveling is not over, for even after I get out of the Army I intend visiting other places in this great world.

Hoping I am accepted into your club, I remain, Yours truly,

David B. Heneby.

35th Bombardment Squadron (H),
A. P. O. 806, Antigua Base Command,
Antingua, B. W. I.,
via San Juan, P.R. Army Bomber.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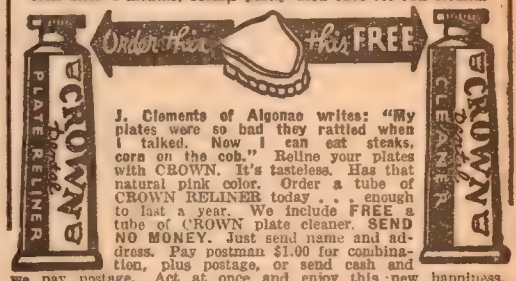

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WITH hundreds of letters from new members coming in every day, it is obviously impossible to print all of them in the columns of the magazine. The editors do the best they can, but naturally most readers buy SHORT STORIES *because of the fiction that it contains. Below are more names and addresses of Ends of the Earth Club members. Most of these members will be eager to hear from you, should you care to correspond with them, and will be glad to reply. Note these lists, if you are interested in writing to other members. Names and addresses will appear only once.*

Pvt. C. Jack Alagra, 16002853, Hq. Co., 10th Inf., A. P. O. No. 810, Iceland
Stanley M. Allison, 12th School Squadron, Scott Field, Ill.
F. Atkins, 1020 56th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Stanley O. Ayeba, 6 Opus St., Oporoma, S. Nigeria, W. Africa.
Pfc. Jos. Barber, 35th Bombardment Sq. (H), A. P. O. 806, Antigua B. W. I., Ant. Base Comm. (via San Juan, P. R. Army Bomber)
Stoker J. Berry, H. M. A. S. Kookaburra, c/o G. P. O., Sydney, Australia
Ralph Bjornstad, 509 West 65th St., Seattle, Wash.
Daniel Black, 1819 Beverly Rd., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Joyce Blackmon, 239 Termino Ave., Long Beach, Calif.
John Bohl, 3322 Church Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Ted R. Bolten, R-75057, No. 4 (B. R. Squad), Ucluelet Bay, B. C., Canada
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Maria Brimlow, 9413 113th St., Richmond Hill, N. Y.
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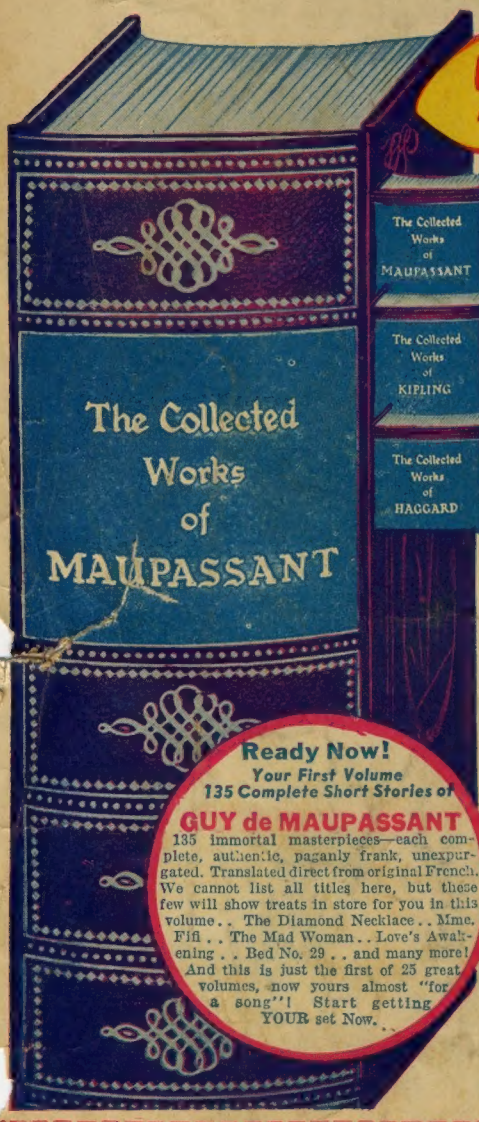

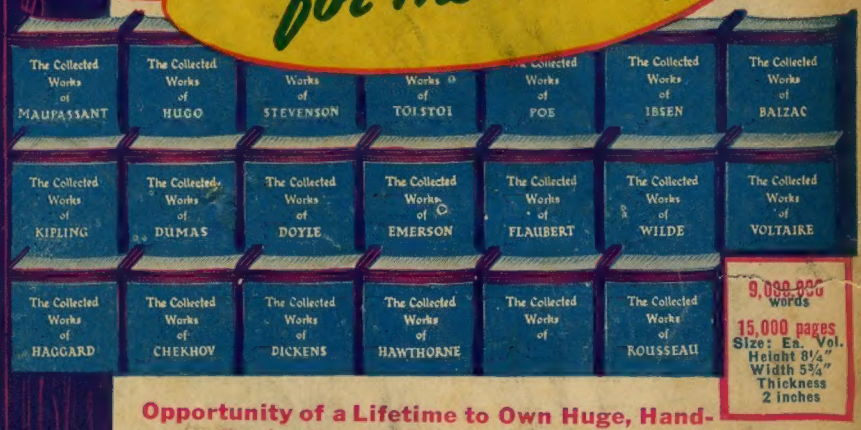
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